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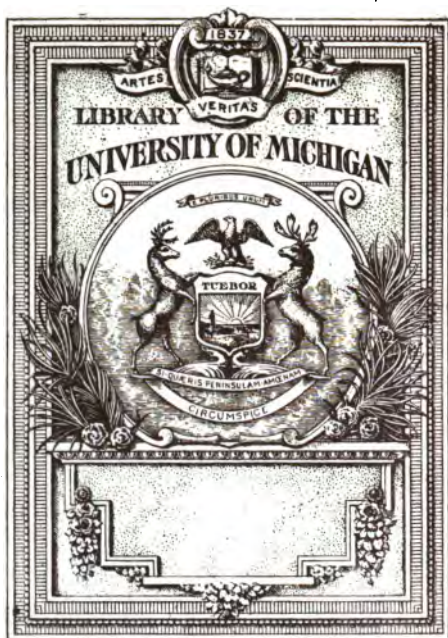
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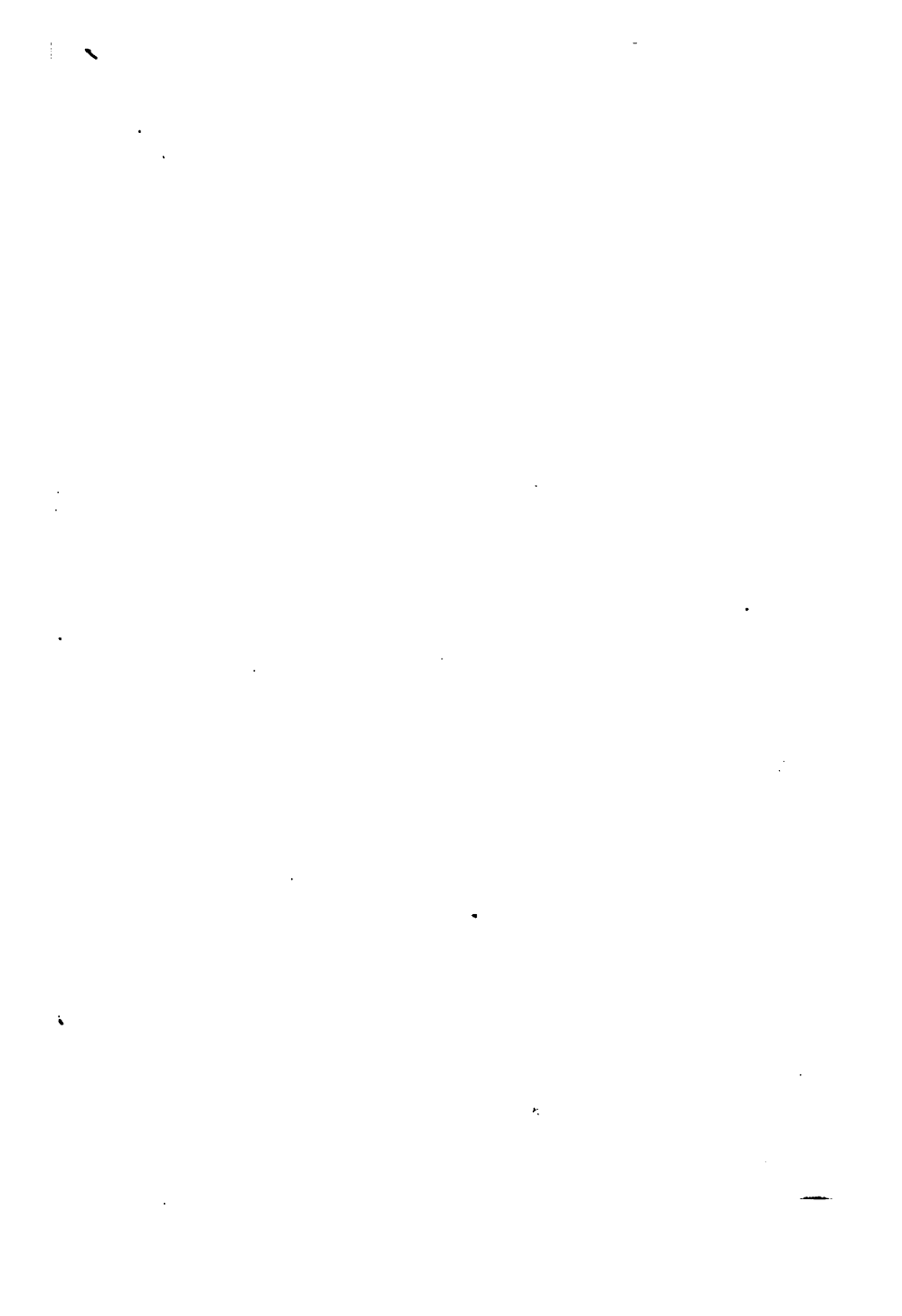
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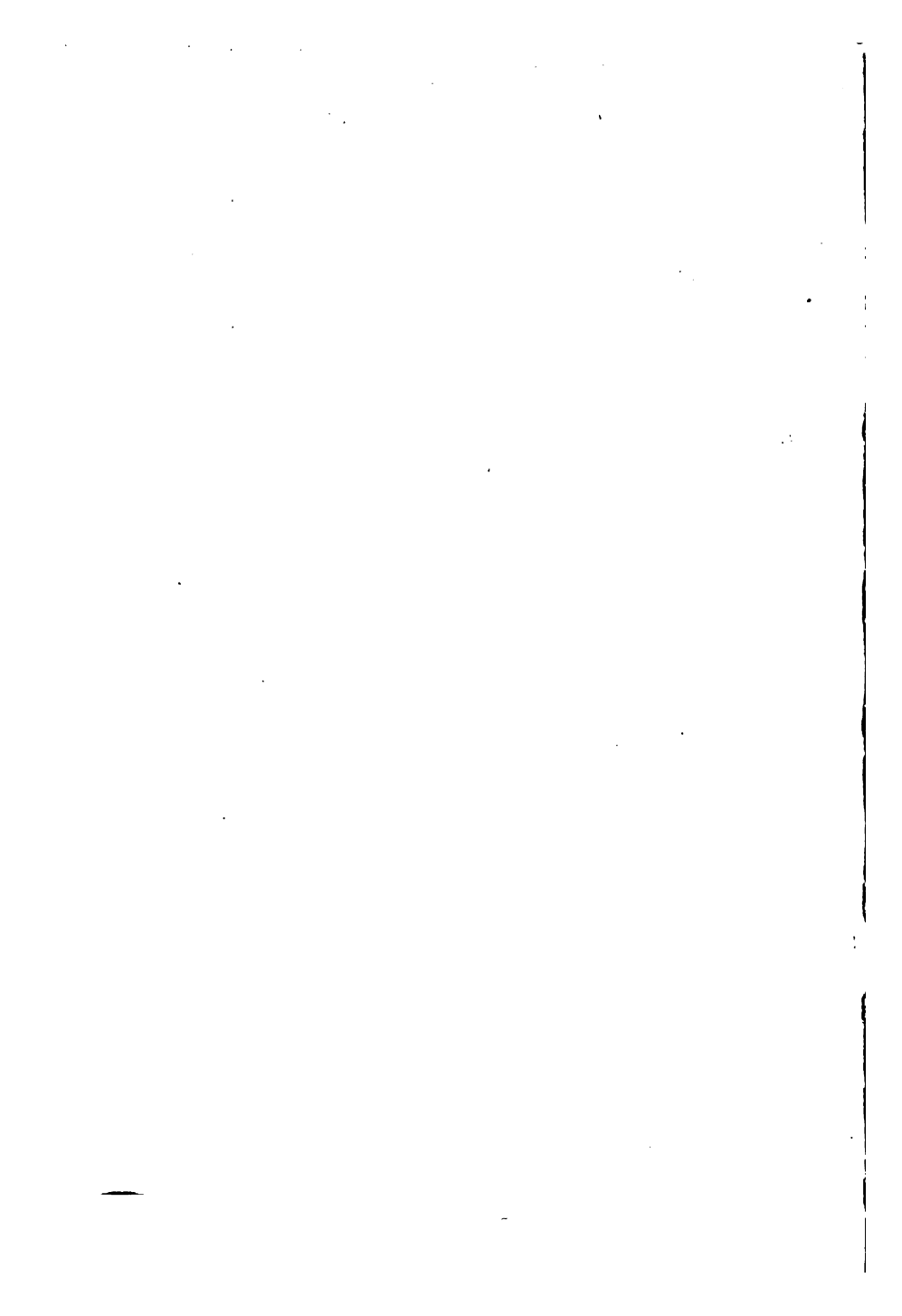
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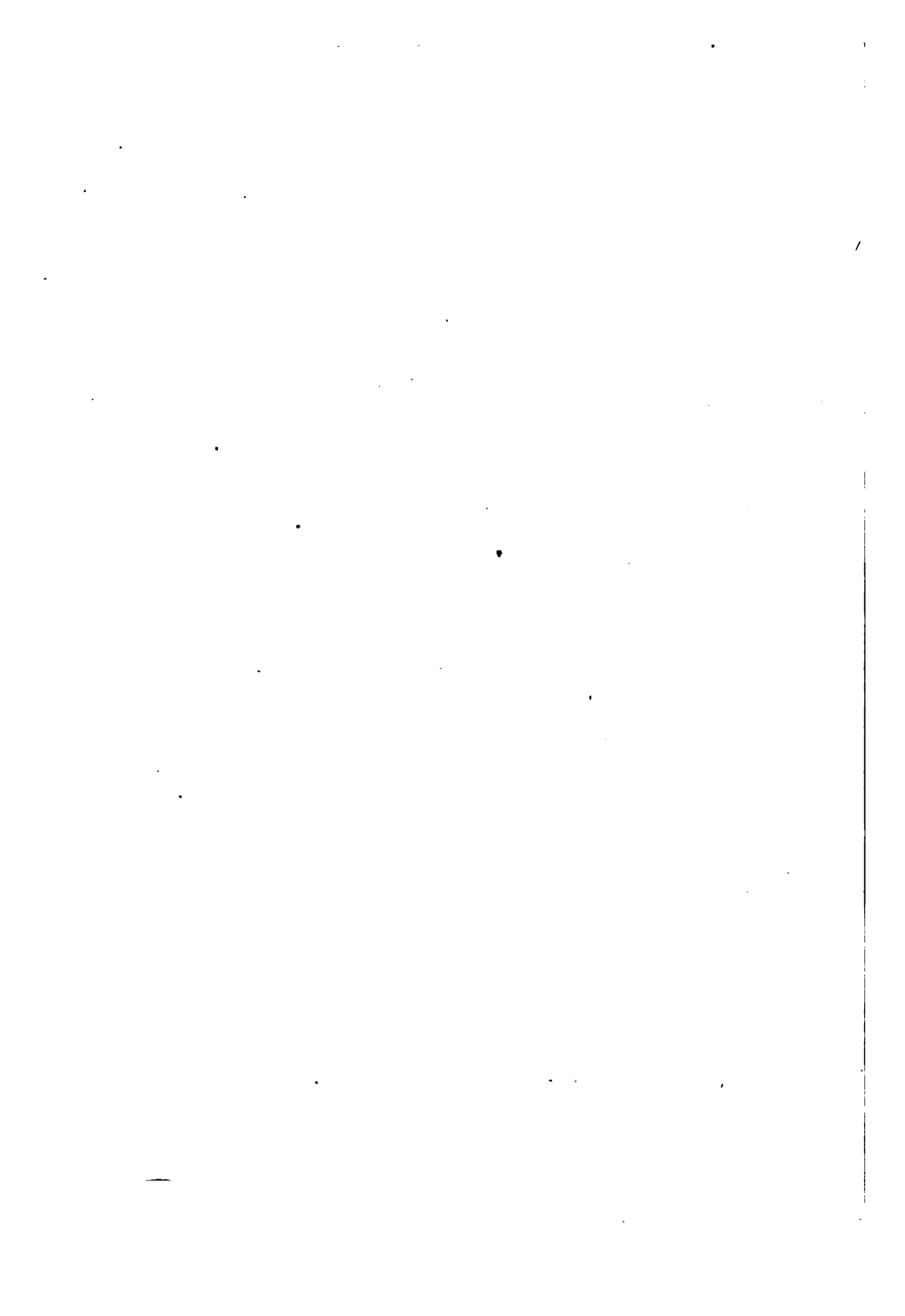
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“THE MEN ARE ALSO PREJUDICED IN HER FAVOR TO-NIGHT.”

THE ACTION AND THE WORD

A NOVEL OF NEW YORK



BY

James BRANDER MATTHEWS

ILLUSTRATED BY
W. T. SMEDLEY



NEW YORK AND LONDON
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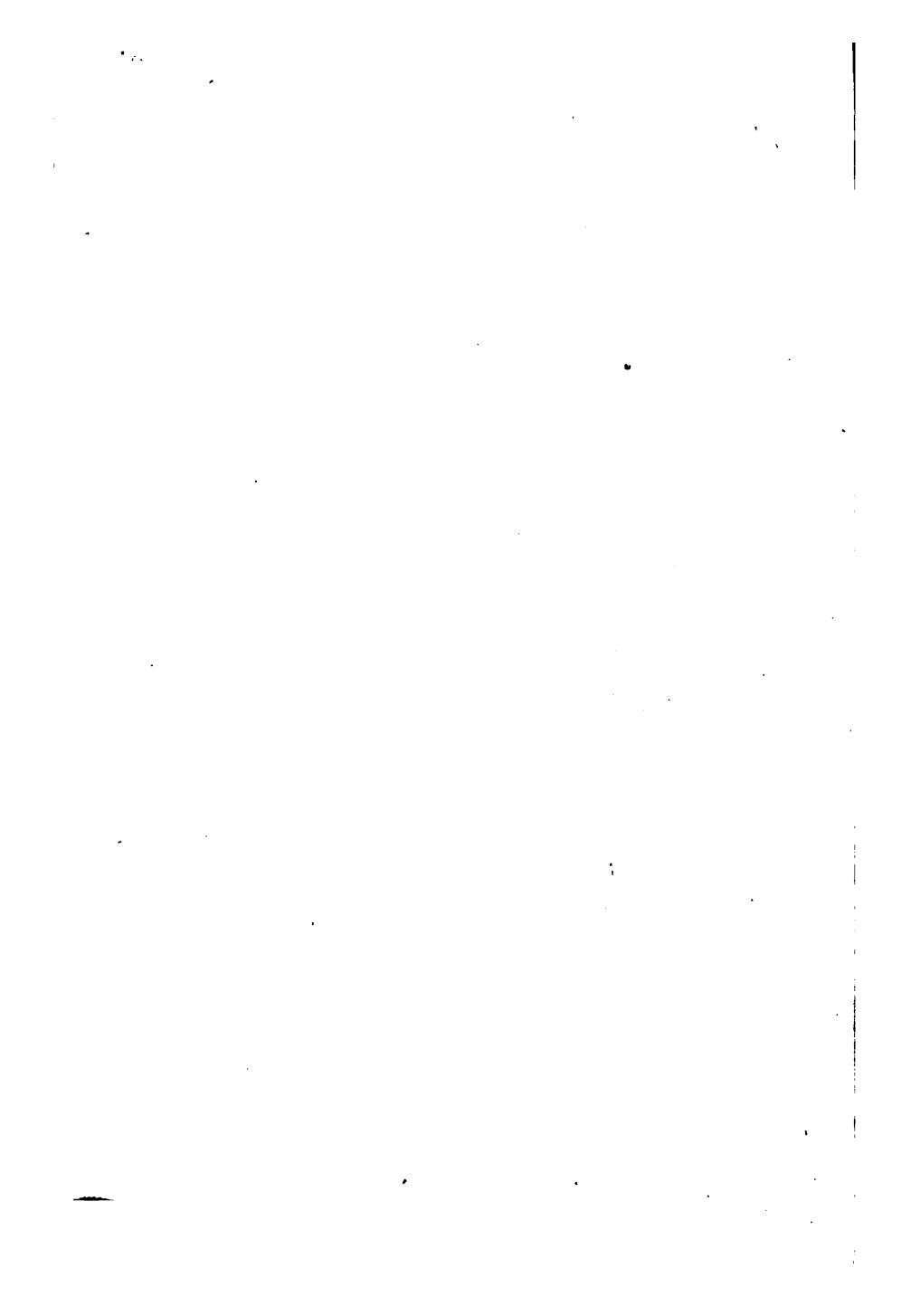
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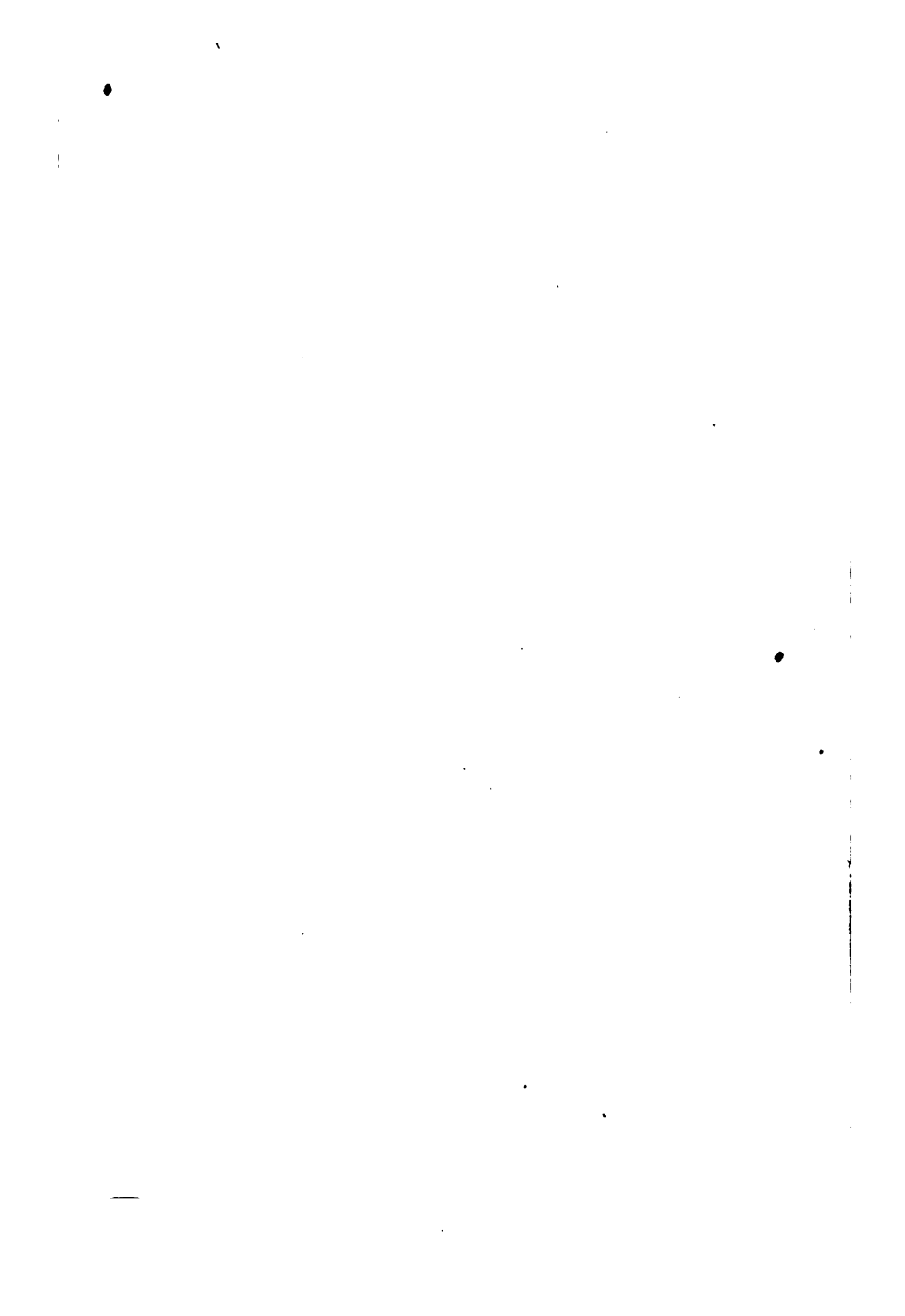
To my Friend and Collaborator
BRONSON HOWARD

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THE ACTION AND THE WORD



CHAPTER I

"Is Mrs. Brookfield considered a beauty?" repeated De Ruyter, the novelist, in answer to the Frenchman's question. "I should say so! Why, there are lots of men who will tell you that Mrs. Brookfield is simply the most fascinating woman in New York."

"That is what I thought," said the Vicomte d'Armagnac, the sociologist, who was studying profit-sharing in America for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. "She is all that is most charming. And her husband is a man of much talent; he was at the Beaux Arts for three years. I have seen constructions of his which are very good—very good."

"Oh, she's the wife of the architect, is she?"

asked Mrs. Suydam, who had brought De Ruyter and D'Armagnac to supper in the palm-garden after taking them to the opera. "I suppose she came to New York while we were abroad last winter, and she must be the daughter-in-law of the doctor. Now, he is charming, if you like; it is worth while to be ill just to have Dr. Brookfield come to your bedside and feel your pulse and cheer you up."

"And he 's a good judge of a horse, is the doctor," said Mrs. Suydam's husband, known generally as Jimmy. "That 's a well-matched pair of Kentucky bays he has for his brougham. I saw them on the avenue to-day, and I said to myself that the man who picked them out knew what he was about."

"But, yes, the doctor is a man very amiable," the Frenchman agreed. "It is a house very agreeable; they have been very genteel for me. And the young Mrs. Brookfield is exquisite."

"I know the doctor, and he 's a dear," Mrs. Jimmy Suydam returned. "I 've known him ever since I can remember, and of course I 've

met his son; but this Mrs. Evert Brookfield—how is it I don't know her? Who was she?"

The four of them were seated at a round table in a corner of the palm-garden. It was after midnight of a Friday early in December, and the room was full of people who had been to the opera and to the theater. The well-dressed women—a little too much bejeweled, some of them—seemed to know one another, and exchanged smiles now and then from table to table. They were stared at intently by the stray couples here and there who had apparently come in from the country to see the sights of the town, and who could hardly eat what they had ordered, so interested were they in the spectacle about them.

"Who was Mrs. Brookfield?" repeated De Ruyter, who keenly relished luxury, and who enjoyed being at supper with a social leader like Mrs. Jimmy. "She was a St. Louis girl, I believe, and Evert met her at Narragansett Pier when he was building old Joshua Hoffman's house. She was a Miss Sanchez—Spanish-creole stock, I suppose; and it's a fact that

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she has the tiny foot of the creole and the supple creole walk. But she has very light hair for a creole."

"There are also blondes in Spain," the Frenchman interjected; "but Mrs. Brookfield is not really a blonde, only when the sun makes shine the gold of her hairs."

"You would call her a brunette, then?" De Ruyter asked. "Perhaps you are right, but I have thought of her as rather fair-headed."

"If that was she I saw in the brougham with the doctor to-day," Jimmy Suydam broke in, "and I guess it was from what you say, well, she has hair the color of old-fashioned molasses candy, only a little darker, maybe. And she's a good looker, too; I caught a flash out of those black eyes of hers—Jove!" And in default of adequate words for expression, Mr. Suydam took up his glass of champagne and emptied it.

"But her eyes are not black," the vicomte declared. "They are brown."

"Dark green, I should say," De Ruyter asserted.



"THE FOUR WERE SEATED AT A ROUND TABLE"

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Mrs. Suydam laughed gently. "What's the matter with her eyes that you men can't agree about them?"

"She has fine eyes, I assure you," D'Armagnac answered. "Perhaps they change in color—that has been seen; it is even very amusing."

As he said this, the Frenchman looked at Mrs. Suydam with interest. He had a wide experience of women, and he had early perceived that Mrs. Suydam was so secure in her own beauty, with its calm and sedate regularity, that she was above petty jealousy of another woman's looks. He fitted into his eye the single glass that hung from his neck by a black ribbon, and he wondered how soon she would weary of this laudation of Mrs. Brookfield.

"Her eyes are all right," persisted De Ruyter, whose perceptions were grosser than D'Armagnac's. "And she can do execution with them even out of the window of a coupé, can't she?" And he looked toward Suydam.

"Oh, Jimmy is no judge of beauty," his wife declared.

"Oh, madame," said D'Armagnac, "how

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can you say that, when you are the living proof?"

"Thank you," she returned placidly, "but I know what I mean. Why, I've even heard him call a shop-girl pretty."

"She was pretty, too!" maintained Jimmy.

"But the shop-girl was not as pretty as this Mrs. Brookfield, was she?" retorted his wife, with the grave smile that was so becoming to her.

Suydam knew his wife's moods, and made no reply.

De Ruyter was less tactful. "It is n't that Mrs. Brookfield is so very pretty, either," he began again, "though she has a certain irregular beauty of color rather than of line. But she is fascinating, that's what she is; and fascination is often independent of mere looks."

"That is true," commented the Frenchman. "Beauty is one thing, and charm is another."

"All this does not explain to me how it is I have n't happened to meet this paragon of yours," said Mrs. Suydam. "Even if she is a creole from St. Louis, she has married into a

good family here. Evert Brookfield used to go everywhere when he first came back from Paris. How is it I have n't seen her? That is a little queer, is n't it?"

"Did you say her name was Sanchez?" asked Jimmy. "Then maybe she 's a daughter or a niece or something of that old Sanchez who had a stock-farm in the blue-grass country?"

"She is his granddaughter, I think," the novelist explained.

"He raised the off leader of the four-in-hand I showed last month," said Suydam. "Dead now, ain't he?"

"Yes; he died just after the Brookfields were married," De Ruyter answered. "She was at the Pier two years ago, and Evert met her there, and they were engaged before the summer was over. They could n't be married till February, and old man Sanchez died while they were off in Mexico on their wedding-tour. She was devoted to him, and I think she is rather emotional, anyhow, so she put on heavy mourning, and she would n't go anywhere all that spring. In the summer they went to Europe—not the

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London season, but the midnight sun, and that sort of thing. Then her baby was born just about a year ago. Evert meant to give a series of dinners so that she might meet people; but the baby was n't quite right, and Dr. Brookfield sent them off to Florida as soon as she was able to get around."

"So she has a baby, too?" said Mrs. Suydam, and for the first time there was a shade of envy in her voice.

"And a fine little fellow he is," De Ruyter responded. "This winter he 's doing very well, so Evert has been able to bring his wife out, and she is getting to know people. I should n't wonder if she was the success of the winter."

"Then perhaps I had better make her a patroness of the entertainment I 've got to get up for the working-girls," said the lady.

"Mrs. Suydam is now the president of the Working-girls' Rest and Recreation League," De Ruyter explained to the Frenchman.

"I know, I know," D'Armagnac declared; "and it is very curious, this alliance of the—

how do you say it?—of the Faubourg St. Germain and of the Faubourg St. Antoine.”

“In London they talk about St. James’s and St. Giles’s,” the novelist responded. “Here in New York I suppose that the proper antithesis is between Fifth Avenue and the Five Points.”

“My working-girls don’t live in the Five Points, thank you,” said Mrs. Suydam, quietly. “They would scorn such a suggestion.”

De Ruyter had written more than one story of the East Side, but his acquaintance with its society was external only; and he now suspected that perhaps his hostess had discovered this. He changed the subject.

“And what kind of an entertainment are you going to give this year?” he asked.

“We have n’t an idea in our heads,” she answered. “Everything has been done. They even had a fair last year, you know; there is no depth to which we are not willing to descend for charity. Can’t you suggest something new? You are so clever, and you ought to help us.”

The young author, thus directly complimented,

felt the awkwardness of this unexpected trial of his wits.

"Really, I have n't an idea, either,"—he hesitated,—“that is, I have n't one now. Maybe I can think of something; but, as you say, everything has been done to death.”

“Oh, I say,” broke in Jimmy Suydam, cutting into the canvasback which the waiter had just given to him, “this food is really too filthy. Here, take that away, and tell Oscar I don't want my duck baked!”

As the waiter removed the plate obsequiously, Mrs. Suydam said to De Ruyter: “He's getting so particular now about his cooking. He sends for the chef and has long consultations—almost as long as those he has with the coachman.”

“The chef is all right,” explained her husband, “but I'm going to get another coachman next season in London. This one is too careless; why, he actually let me take my coach round the horse-show with the lazy-backs down! Did you ever hear of such a thing? I'd have sacked him that night, if I'd known where to get another as good.”

Mrs. Suydam was not paying any attention to her husband; she was gazing across the room toward the entrance. A man and a woman had just entered, and were now looking for a vacant table.

"Is that your Mrs. Brookfield?" she asked. "The man with her is Evert Brookfield, and she has molasses-candy hair."

The men looked up with interest.

"That 's the one I saw in the brougham," answered Jimmy. "Stunning, ain't she?"

"Bigre!" said the Frenchman; "elle est bien en beauté ce soir!"

"I don't think it 's her beauty really that makes her so fetching," De Ruyter declared, as a waiter conducted husband and wife to a table in the corner beyond the Suydams. "I know lots of prettier women, after all—not that she is n't good-looking enough in her own way."

As Evert Brookfield took his seat by the side of his wife, he glanced up and saw that Mrs. Suydam was looking at him. He bowed cordially, and his wife nodded gaily to D'Arma-gnac and De Ruyter, flashing a brilliant smile at

them. She seemed to be in high spirits as she and her husband put their heads together over the bill of fare.

Mrs. Suydam made a careful examination of Mrs. Brookfield.

"Yes," she asserted, "she has fine eyes, and some people might think her hair pretty; but she is not a tearing beauty, as they say in England."

"No; she is n't," De Ruyter answered. "She 's worse than that."

Mrs. Suydam looked at him for an explanation.

"What I mean is that she is more dangerous than a merely pretty woman," he continued. "If a man was talking to your tearing beauty, and Mrs. Brookfield looked at him across the room, he 'd have to leave his tearing beauty *plantée-là*, as the vicomte here would say, and he 'd go over to Mrs. Brookfield in spite of everything. He just could n't help it."

"C'est ça," D'Armagnac added. "Elle a quelque chose de très-particulier. Ce n'est pas un type Anglo-Saxon, il me semble?"

"No; it is n't an American type, or an English type either," the novelist explained. "It's Southern—Latin—creole; it's richer and suaver than any Northern type. Did you notice that undulating walk of hers? She seemed simply to swim across the room."

"Perhaps she learned to swim at Narragansett," said Mrs. Jimmy, with a hard little laugh. "It seems she made Evert Brookfield swim after her. Quite a romance, was n't it? Now, he is a handsome man, if you like, with a figure any woman is glad to look at."

"Evert Brookfield?" returned her husband. "Yes; he ain't bad-looking, and he's a nice fellow, too. He used to play a good game of polo before he got his growth; he's too big now."

"He is one of the finest-looking men in New York," declared Mrs. Suydam, "tall and strong and clean,—you know what I mean,—and he carries himself so well."

A dapper young man, with an eager expression on his thin face, had entered the room, and was going over to the corner where the Brookfields sat.

"There 's Gurney Twiss!" cried De Ruyter. "I 'd forgotten all about it, but to-night was the opening performance of his Amateur Club, and Mrs. Brookfield was to make her first appearance."

"So she acts too, does she?" remarked Mrs. Suydam, as she returned the dapper young man's bow.

In his enthusiasm the amateur actor could not resist the desire to overflow. He turned aside to Mrs. Jimmy's table.

"Oh, Mrs. Suydam," he began, "I 'm so sorry you were not there to-night."

"Was it such a great success?" she asked, with her coldly pleasant smile.

"I see you have snow on your back hair," said De Ruyter. "I hope that does n't mean that your performance was a frost?"

"A frost?" echoed Twiss, too polite to express his violent disapproval of this suggestion. "Nothing of the sort, I assure you. It was really a great success, a very great success indeed! And although I say it who should n't, I don't believe the *Happy Pair* ever

went better anywhere—not even with professionals.”

“And who were the happy pair?” asked Mrs. Suydam; “you and Mrs. Brookfield?”

“Yes, and she was ever so good,” declared the young fellow. “She ’s inexperienced, of course, and I had to coach her in the business of the part and all that sort of thing. But she ’s got it in her, you know. She ’s got real *abandon*, that ’s what she ’s got. She let herself go.”

“I conceive that,” commented the Frenchman, gravely, as became one who took the art of the stage seriously. “She has temperament, I doubt not.”

“She is going to be the very best amateur actress in New York before the winter is over,” Twiss asserted; “you see if she is n’t. I ’m going to try to get her to do *Froufrou* some day.”

“So that you can play the husband?” De Ruyter asked.

“The husband? Oh, dear, no,” replied Twiss, with a deprecatory gesture. “That ’s too heavy

for me. But *Valréas*, now—I've always wanted to play *Valréas*. I think there is a lot more in *Valréas* than anybody ever got out of it—even professionals."

"And that is the reason you think Mrs. Brookfield can play *Froufrou*?" asked Mrs. Jimmy, with a smile so sweet that D'Armagnac had no right to suspect a sarcasm.

"Mrs. Brookfield can play anything!" was the emphatic answer. "She's so charming, she could n't fail. Really, Mrs. Suydam, it's a thousand pities you were not there to-night. I know you would have enjoyed it."

"I enjoy hearing you talk about it now," was her laughing answer; and the amateur actor laughed back and took his leave, going along to the Brookfields, where a chair was waiting for him.

At the Suydams' table the waiter passed cigars and cigarettes.

"We smoke here, then?" asked D'Armagnac.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Jimmy answered. "I don't mind. I'm used to it now. And this is a palm-garden, you know."

"Since you permit," the vicomte returned, and he took a cigarette.

"You asked for an idea, Mrs. Suydam," said De Ruyter. "Why not get up *Froufrou* for your working-girls?"

"With Mrs. Brookfield as *Froufrou*?" asked Mrs. Jimmy.

"Of course," was the reply. "Without her the idea is worthless. And naturally I can't say whether you can persuade her or not—"

"I think I should let Gurney Twiss do the persuading," she remarked.

"She is a little *Froufrou* herself," declared D'Armagnac. "That will be very interesting."

"If you want to make a lot of money," pursued De Ruyter, "you have only to get Mrs. Brookfield to act *Froufrou* at the Metropolitan. Make the tickets five dollars. Keep the whole thing very exclusive."

Mrs. Suydam laughed again. "Exclusive? at the Metropolitan?"

"Yes," returned the young novelist; "even there you can exclude everybody who has n't five dollars. That 's one process of exclusion,

and it 's perfectly efficacious. Then you have a long list of patronesses, and you might allow the box-holders to retain their boxes as a special favor and just to keep up the exclusive flavor."

"That 's not half bad, that idea of yours," said Jimmy. "Should n't wonder if a performance like that would bring in a goodish bit of gate-money."

"You might easily make ten thousand dollars," De Ruyter asserted.

"If I undertake to do that, I may make money for my working-girls," Mrs. Suydam suggested; "but should n't I be robbing myself of a good deal of rest and recreation?"

"Not at all," was the novelist's reply. "You will have lots of fun in managing the thing. Besides, it will be a new sensation for you."

"There 's something in that," Mrs. Suydam admitted. "It would be a novelty, I suppose; and life is very monotonous, after all."

"Besides," urged De Ruyter, "you can get other people to take most of the trouble off your hands. Sherrington will stage-manage it for you. He 's the very man; the amateurs

like him, and he can get good work out of them."

"It might be amusing," said Mrs. Jimmy, at last. "Thank you for the suggestion. I won't say that I'll take it, but I'll think about it."

De Ruyter gazed across the room at the table where Twiss was sitting with the Brookfields.

"I hope you will get it up," he said. "I'd give up five dollars myself to see how Mrs. Brookfield would do *Froufrou*."

"She will do it well," D'Armagnac declared. "She has temperament, I am sure."

"If we only had somebody on the stage now with a share of her delightful femininity there would be some hope for the American drama," the novelist went on. "Kilburn has been after me to do a society play for him—a sort of New York *School for Scandal*, you know. Now, if I could be sure of a *Lady Teazle* like Mrs. Brookfield, I'd like to try it."

Mrs. Suydam looked over at the other table. She saw two men standing there, talking to the party at supper and very attentive to Mrs. Brookfield.

"I see what you mean," said Mrs. Jimmy. "She 's not what I should call a beauty exactly, but she seems to be attractive. There 's no doubt the men like her. I wonder how much her husband would enjoy her acting *Froufrou* at the Metropolitan."

"Why should n't he enjoy seeing his wife make a great success?" asked De Ruyter.

"Why not, indeed?" Mrs. Suydam repeated. "But some men are so selfish, you know; they like to have their wives for themselves! And I have a notion that Evert Brookfield may be a man of that kind." Then she made ready to rise from the table. "Shall we go now?"

The men stood up at once, her husband being the last to get on his feet.

"Beastly nuisance it 's snowing, ain't it?" he asked at large. "Wish I had n't ordered the bays to be put to the landau."

As they left the table, D'Armagnac and De Ruyter exchanged salutations again with the Brookfields. Mrs. Suydam gave a final glance toward the corner; and she saw that the two men who had been bending over Mrs. Brook-

field had now taken chairs on each side of her, although the table was meant only for four, and that still another man had stopped on his way to the door and was joining in the merry conversation.

CHAPTER II

The next morning, when Evert Brookfield came down to breakfast, he found his father standing at one of the dining-room windows with the newspaper in his hand. The storm was over; the sky was brilliant again; the wind had risen, and the atmosphere was singularly pure. The sunshine flooded the window where the doctor was looking out at the men shoveling the snow from the sidewalk.

The young architect noted how big his father bulked in the morning glare, and how strong the doctor seemed in spite of his threescore years and in spite of all the exposure and anxiety of four years' service in the field. The son's admiration for the father was equal to his affection. Evert was proud of the doctor's record in the war, of his prominence in the profession, of his popularity in society. Rather

serious himself, he relished intensely his father's shrewd humor. Rather modest also, and even self-deprecatory, he had never ceased to be gratified that his father had made a friend of him and a companion when he had been little more than a boy.

The rasping of the shovels and the chipping of the picks on the pavement must have prevented the doctor from hearing his son's footsteps on the polished floor, for he did not move until Evert had laid an arm on his shoulder and said, "Good morning, father."

Then Dr. Brookfield turned and shook hands heartily with his son. "Good morning, my boy, good morning. And how is Carla after her first appearance on any stage?"

"I think she is still vibrating with the novel excitement of it," Evert answered.

"It was a great success, I see by the paper," said the doctor.

"You don't mean to say that there's anything about it in the *Dial*?" asked his son, with a shrinking of annoyance.

"Why not?" Dr. Brookfield returned.

"They put everything into the newspapers now—even things that are really important."

"What does it say?" Evert inquired, a little ashamed of the eager gesture with which he had extended his hand.

"It is not so bad as it might be," his father declared. "It 's vulgar, of course, but then those fellows can't help being vulgar now. Probably they have no suspicion how vulgar they really are."

Evert seized the *Dial* and read the paragraph the doctor pointed out. It was in a column headed "What is Going On in Society," and it began by stating that "the beautiful Mrs. Evert Brookfield won all hearts last night at the performance given by the Amateur Club and patronized by the most exclusive set"; and it went on with a description of her costume, ending at last with a detailed catalogue of her charms: "Her soulful eyes, her pearly teeth, her glorious brown hair, the exquisite grace of her *démarche*, all lend perfection to a performance of the *Happy Pair* which will be remem-



"EVERT SEIZED THE *DIAL*"



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bered as an epoch in the history of private theatricals in New York."

As the husband read this flattery of his wife, printed in a newspaper for thousands to see, he flushed with indignation.

"It might be worse," said his father, with a consoling smile. "It says Carla is pretty; now, it might have said she was ugly."

"Oh, they could n't do that!" cried her husband, impetuously.

"Of course it would not be the truth," the doctor explained. "But the public does n't require an affidavit for everything it reads in the papers. I suppose this creature is right in saying that the performance last night was successful?"

"I suppose so," his son answered a little regretfully. "I mean—well—yes, it was, of course. She really acted very well—so well that I'm afraid she will want to act again."

"And you don't want her to?" the doctor asked.

The son held up the *Dial*, and then threw it on a chair. "I don't want to have that sort

of thing written about my wife, do I?" he returned. "And I don't know that I liked to see her acting, either. I was glad that she was enjoying herself, that she was successful, that she was admired, but I hated the publicity of it. I did not like having other men staring at her. She was my wife, after all; she belonged to me; and it was an impertinence for any other man to gaze at her. That's absurd, of course, and I know it, but it's the way I felt. I knew half of the people in the house, I suppose, and the whole affair was as private as anything of the sort could be, and yet— And I don't wonder they stared, either, for she did look lovely!"

"I don't doubt it," his father rejoined. "She knew she was being admired, and that would naturally make her look her best. And Carla likes admiration."

"What woman does n't?" retorted her husband.

"She likes it more than most women, I think," answered the doctor.

"She deserves it more than most," his son replied.

Dr. Brookfield laughed a sonorous laugh, wholesome like all his characteristics. "You need not stand up for her as if I was attacking her, my boy. You must know how fond I am of her, and what a pleasure it has been to me to have her in the house. She is very kind to her old father-in-law, and very considerate always. But she 's a woman, for all that, and she likes to move through a cloud of masculine adoration—yours first of all, as a matter of course, and mine, too, old as I am, and the baby's, young as he is, and then every other man's."

His son smiled a little pitifully. "I am afraid you are right. In fact, I am sure you are—and I wish I was n't. I 'm always thinking about Carla and observing her, and I 've noticed that she can't help inviting men to fall in love with her, only to be greatly grieved when they do; and she is honestly astonished at it, too. Why, she is always getting a care and attention from waiters and car-porters and men of that sort—an attention quite different in kind from that they pay to other women; and she enjoys that, too, although she probably

has n't really looked at any one of them enough to identify him five minutes after."

"Evert," said his father, gravely, "your mind is naturally analytic, and I do not quite understand how it is you get on as an architect."

His son laughed at this personality. "I don't get on as fast as I should like. There 's that new fifteen-story building of the Methuselah Life-Insurance Company; I thought I was sure of that—in fact, Mr. Carkendale had almost promised it to me. They say now there 's to be a competition. It will be a restricted competition, of course, and we shall be invited to compete; but it makes our chance pretty slim."

"Why not give a dinner and ask a lot of the ultra-fashionables to meet the Carkendales? That would capture him, if anything would—or it would, at least, capture Mrs. Carkendale, who has social ambitions in her old age."

"Shall I descend to that?" the young architect asked, not a little tempted.

"Make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," returned his father. "Ask the people

whose names are in the *Dial* every Sunday—the Jimmy Suydams and Mrs. Winston-Smith and—well, you know as well as I do the kind of people middle-aged Presbyterian climbers would like to dine with.”

“I should despise myself if I got a job that way,” said the son, gloomily, pulling at the point of his beard.

“You would despise yourself if you did a bad job,” the doctor rejoined; “and until you do a bad job you need not waste on yourself any despisery, as the darky called it. In fact, you had better let yourself alone and stop prying into the recesses of your own soul: that way misery lies.”

“If I get the Methuselah building, I sha’n’t have time to explore my own soul,” the son returned more cheerfully. “I have n’t tackled one of those sky-scrapers yet, and I suppose I should find it a knotty problem. But it would be amusing, I’m sure, very amusing; I’d really like to try it.”

“Then we had better have the Carkendales to dinner and help them scale the social ladder,”

said Dr. Brookfield, and he laughed again. "Besides, I shall get some fun out of that myself, when I see Mrs. Carkendale making up to Mrs. Jimmy Suydam. And as for her meeting with Mrs. Winston-Smith, that will be as terrible as the duel of the *Constitution* and the *Guerrière*."

A wood fire sputtered and sang on the tiled hearth between the windows. Evert stooped to replace a brand that had fallen too far forward. As he rose to his feet, he heard the familiar rustling of his wife's morning gown.

Then he saw the curtains part that divided the dining-room from the hall, and a smiling baby was thrust through by invisible hands.

"Say, 'Good morning, papa!'" cried a voice from behind the curtains. "Say, 'Good morning, grandpa! I'm a year old to-day. And don't you think I'm a big boy for my age?'"

The child sprang up in his mother's firm grasp and held out his hands toward his father.

As Evert crossed the room, his wife slipped her head in by the side of the baby's and scolded him playfully. "Naughty papa," she

said; "naughty papa did n't remember baby's birthday!"

"Oh, that 's why you were so mysterious this morning, is it?" asked her husband.

Then the young mother stepped inside the dining-room, and looked at the doctor reproachfully. "Naughty grandpa," she added; "he did n't remember, either. Never mind, baby; mama remembered. Your mama won't forget you even if your papa and your grandpapa are naughty and never think about you at all."

"A year old to-day?" the doctor asked. "So he is. How fast time goes now! You can't do me a greater favor, my dear, than to forget all my birthdays. I don't want to remember them myself."

"That 's all very well," his daughter-in-law declared, standing up on tiptoe so that he could kiss her. "You have had lots of birthdays, ever so many; and this is baby's first. It is n't the same thing at all, and I shall never forgive you."

"Sturdy little fellow, I must say," the doctor asserted with obvious pride, as he stooped down

over the baby, who was gurgling and kicking, and who now reached up and clutched the grandfather's long gray mustache.

"That 's right, baby! Pull it hard and hurt him!" said the mother, as she gently opened the boy's fist.

The wintry sunlight fell full on mother and child as she stood near the window, with the tall form of the grandfather rising above them. One ray made a halo about the boy's head, and another swept across her cheek, making visible a faint down at the corner of her upper lip. In any one else Evert might have thought this superfluous and perhaps unpleasant; in his wife he found it adorable. He thought her beautiful, although he knew that her features were irregular, and her mouth a little too large, and her figure a little too plump for her height. But he would not have had her different in the smallest particular; he would not have altered a line or a shade, for fear of spoiling the harmony which made her what she was in his eyes. To look at her was an unceasing pleasure to him, and her undulating walk as she had crossed the

room to where the doctor stood had filled his heart with irresponsible joy. He was sometimes conscious of the absurdity of this, but the fact remained. And now it gave him keen delight to have her standing there, with his father looking down on her affectionately. He liked to see his wife and his father together, and he thought how bleak life would have been for him if the woman whom he had chosen had not taken to the father for whom he had so affectionate an admiration. By good fortune, also, the doctor liked her and made much of her, glad that his son's happiness was assured.

"Clap hands for grandpa!" she cried, suddenly kissing the baby in the neck, and then tossing him up and down in her vigorous grip.

The baby cooed again, and tried to clap his hands; and Evert saw a dimple come in his wife's cheek and then disappear. That fugitive dimple also pleased him greatly, and he wondered why it was so rare.

"So he is a year old to-day, is he?" asked the doctor, holding out his finger, which the

baby clutched instantly. "And how many teeth has he?"

"Five," the young mother responded proudly. "Is n't that doing well? He cut the fifth only a week ago, and he scarcely cried at all."

"In fact," said Dr. Brookfield, "in your opinion, he is the most remarkable child the world has ever seen?"

She laughed in sheer happiness. "Of course I think so," she answered; "I 'm his mother. And you ought to think so, too; you 're his grandfather—although you don't deserve to be, since you neglected him and forgot his birthday." Here the baby let go of the doctor's finger and turned its head down on its mother's neck. "Yes, my pet; you are quite right to have nothing to do with him. He treated you shamefully, so he did!"

"Five teeth already," said the doctor. "And you have thirty-two, and so has Evert, and even I have a few left; and that being the case, don't you think we might have breakfast?"

"Oh, I 'm so sorry," she cried. "I did n't mean to keep you waiting, really I did n't, but

I thought you 'd like to wish baby many happy returns of the day."

"So I do, my dear, so I do," the grandfather declared.

"And now I won't keep you another minute. Lina," she cried, "Lina!" And when the nurse did not answer at once, she turned to the butler, who had just brought in the coffee. "Oh, Wilson, please tell Lina to come and take baby."

Evert noted how his wife smiled on the butler as she gave this order, and how the man moved at once to execute it with an alacrity not to be expected from his ordinary stolidity. He noted also that his wife was quite unconscious of her smile and of its effect. She was holding the baby out at arm's-length and then hugging him tight, and the action filled her husband's heart with artistic satisfaction. Somehow, although their child was a boy, it seemed to belong rather more to her than to him.

A moment later the curtains parted again, and a robust Frenchwoman appeared, with ribbons streaming from her spotless cap; and the baby was transferred to her and borne away up-stairs.

Then the young mother took her place at the head of the table; her husband sat opposite to her, and her father-in-law at her right. It was an instance of Dr. Brookfield's swift and un-failing tact, as well as of his constant kindness, that, after the young couple had come to live with him, he had chosen to take the attitude of a guest in his own house, yielding the management to his daughter-in-law, and not even inviting a friend to dinner without asking her if it would be convenient.

"Well, my dear," Dr. Brookfield began, as they sat down, "and were you satisfied with your triumph last night?"

Her face glowed again with the recollection of her excitement.

"It was splendid!" she answered. "I don't know when I've enjoyed myself so much. I was awfully scared, awfully, but I did n't faint or anything. I don't suppose I acted very well, but they did n't hiss me, anyway."

The doctor laughed at this suggestion, and she laughed, too, in joyous relaxation.

"Well, they did n't hiss, and they did applaud

ever so much," she went on. "And after it was over they said lots of pretty things of me, and of course that was nice. Maybe I did n't play the part quite as well as they said I did,—I don't know,—but it did seem to go all right after I had once got started. It was fun; and even if they did n't mean all they said, I liked to hear it all the same."

"They did n't say any more than was true," her husband declared; and she smiled her thanks at him across the table.

"Then the *Dial* is quite right in thinking that last night was an epoch in the history of private theatricals in New York?" asked the doctor.

"Who said that?" she inquired eagerly. "People do say nice things, don't they?"

"That 's in the *Dial* this morning," Dr. Brookfield answered.

"Is there something in the paper about me?" she cried, with a tremor in her voice. "Oh, Evert, why did n't you tell me before?" She sprang up from the table. "Where is it? Show it to me at once!"

Her husband picked up the newspaper and

pointed out the paragraph, saying: "You must n't mind it. They don't mean any harm. They don't know any better."

But his wife was not listening to him. She was reading the paragraph with avidity.

"He is complimentary, is n't he?" she commented, as a flush came on her cheek. "He's really very nice, I must say."

To her husband's surprise, the crudity of the thing did not seem to strike her.

"Who wrote it?" she inquired at last, with her eyes sparkling. "Don't you think you ought to find out and ask him to dinner or something?"

The doctor laughed out again. "I hardly think that is necessary," he said, "although the fellow would like it, I don't doubt."

"Well, Ever^t might at least write and thank him," she continued, with her eyes still fixed on the paper. "And then he might tell him that my hair is n't exactly brown, really, you know; it only looks so in some lights."

"For the man's own sake, you had better not invite him here," the doctor declared, with his

quiet smile. "Dark eyes and light hair make a woman very dangerous."

"Is my hair really light?" she asked, backing into the sunlight of the window, which touched the brown tresses with fire.

Her father-in-law perceived the manœuvre, and retorted: "You don't want to deny that you are really a dangerous woman, do you?"

"I should hate to have to do that," she returned gaily. "And what do the other papers say?"

"That's so," the doctor admitted; "perhaps some of the others may have something to say, too." He took a coin from his pocket and gave it to the butler. "Wilson, go to the corner and buy a copy of every one of the morning papers—except the *Dial*, of course."

"And hurry up, please, Wilson!" cried the young wife; and when the butler had left the room, she continued: "I am so anxious to see if there is n't some real criticism in one of the papers. I'd like to know what my faults are, —I must have some faults, you know,—and I want to correct them."

"But it 's all over now," her husband responded. "What is done is done, and you have every reason to be satisfied with it."

"But if I act again, I want to act better the next time," she declared.

"You don't want to act again, do you?" urged her husband.

"Oh, I don't know about that," she returned. "Why should n't I act if I don't act so very badly?" And she held up the paper. "Besides, Mr. Twiss wants me to. He said last night that he had never played the *Happy Pair* with anybody so sympathetic as I was. He was really very encouraging."

"That was very kind of him, indeed," Evert asserted gruffly.

"Yes; was n't it?" she responded. "He said he thought I could play *Froufrou*, but I don't know. What I'd like to do is to play *Juliet*; I'd love to do that, if Evert were only *Romeo*, now."

She was standing behind her husband's chair, and she stroked his hair with a familiar gesture that made him want to get up and fold her in his arms.

"How would you like to play *Romeo*, Evert?" asked his father, with another hearty laugh.

"I should n't like it at all," Evert answered. "I never could act. I found that out when I was a boy of fourteen by blacking up and taking part in a minstrel show."

His wife looked at him seriously for a moment, and said: "You would have to black up for *Othello*, of course, but I don't want to be *Desdemona*. I should hate to have you jealous of me, even in a play. But *Romeo and Juliet*—that 's different, is n't it? They are lovers; why, they are married, just as we are—"

"You must not count on my playing *Romeo*," Evert broke in. "There are very few things I would n't do for you, Carla, but that is one of them."

"I suppose you are too tall now," she admitted, "but you have lovely lover-like eyes, you know, and that pointed beard of yours is very Italian, is n't it?" And she sat on the arm of her husband's chair, and with her fingers combed his thin beard.

"Look out, Evert," said his father, "or she

will persuade you to play the part in spite of yourself."

"Oh, no," she returned; "I would n't do that. I never want Evert to do anything for me that he does n't really want to do. Besides, I love him too much ever to want to see him do anything he would n't do well, and if he does n't want to act, I suppose he would n't do it well."

"I certainly don't want to act," her husband declared.

"When I was a little girl," she went on, "I thought I 'd like to go on the stage and be a great actress, and play a queen and wear a crown, and have a prince making love to me."

"Even if you want to be an actress," said the doctor, dryly, "there 's no need for you to go on the stage; society offers endless histrionic opportunities."

She looked at him a little puzzled for a moment, and then smiled. "I see what you mean," she said, "but I don't like insincere people. I believe in being straightforward."

"Well," the doctor rejoined, "it 's being

straightforward, is n't it, to know what you want and to go for it by the shortest path?"

"You do put things so queerly sometimes," she returned. "I can't always tell whether you are laughing at me or not."

"I never laugh at you, my child," her father-in-law responded; "but I'm willing we should laugh together. And here's a chance for you. Evert wants to be the architect of the new building the Methuselah Life-Insurance means to put up next spring—"

"I know," she interrupted, "it was promised to him, and now that horrid Mr. Carkendale is going to have a competition. It's the meanest thing I ever heard of. I don't see how you can speak to such people. I told Evert he ought to cut old Carkendale in the street the next time he met him."

Evert smiled, and said: "Father thinks we had better ask him to dinner instead."

"Does he?" she asked. "Do you really?" And she turned to the doctor.

"I do really," was the answer.

"And if we do, will he give Evert the build-

ing? Is that what you mean?" she inquired, jumping off the arm of the chair. "That's a capital idea, is n't it? Why did n't I think of it myself? I do wish I could help you in business—you know I do."

"Then you approve of the suggestion?" the doctor asked. "And you think Evert might put off cutting Carkendale in the street until after he has got the Methuselah building finished?"

"Oh, then it would n't matter," she replied carelessly.

"True," said the doctor; "it would not be worth while then."

"When shall we have him to dinner?" she inquired eagerly. "The sooner the better, I suppose. And for Evert's sake, I 'll be as nice to the old man as I know how—"

"Hold up, hold up!" cried Dr. Brookfield. "You must n't overdo it, or you will ruin all. If you were to look at the old fellow like that, and if Mrs. Carkendale should see it—well, it's good-by to that commission for the skyscraper."

"Is there a Mrs. Carkendale?" Carla asked, in dismay. "Oh, I did n't know that! That's too bad, is n't it? Have we got to ask her, too?"

"I 'm afraid that we must invite both Mr. and Mrs. Carkendale if we wish to accomplish our purpose," the doctor declared. "And we must pick the people to meet them very carefully, so that they shall feel they have been well treated, and that they may go away with a lively sense of social favors to come."

"Oh, I see," she replied, "I see. How many in all?"

"Fourteen, I should say," her father-in-law answered. "We are three and they are two—five. And the Jimmy Suydams—"

"That was Mrs. Suydam Mr. Twiss stopped to talk to last night, was n't it, Evert?" she interrupted.

"That 's she," her husband replied.

"She is handsome," said the doctor, "and her husband is harmless."

"I did n't get a good look at her last night," Carla remarked, "but I should n't say she was

so very good-looking. Maybe she was n't feeling very well then; but it is a fact you men often call a woman good-looking when I can't see it at all."

"You are not the first woman I have heard making a remark like that," said the doctor, smiling. "Do you suppose the lenses in men's eyes differ from those in women's?"

The butler entered the dining-room with half a dozen newspapers in his hand.

"Are those the papers, Wilson?" cried the young wife, clutching them. "Thank you." And she began to turn the pages with an anxiety that seemed to her husband almost feverish.

"Here's one mean little paragraph," she said after a moment's search. "Just listen to it! 'The Amateur Club acted *A Happy Pair* last night at Mendelssohn Hall before a very select audience, and Mr. Gurney Twiss repeated his former triumphs.' And nothing about me!"

"Not a line?" asked her husband.

"Not a word!" she answered, handing him the paper and then opening another.

She peered through its pages in vain. "Why, there is n't anything at all in this one!" she cried at last.

"The *Dial* seems the most enterprising, after all," the doctor remarked dryly. "It always has the news,—what there is of it,—and plenty of it, too—such as it is."

"And there is n't anything in these, either," she declared plaintively, dropping the rest of the papers on the floor one after another.

When his wife had taken her seat again at the breakfast-table, Evert was surprised to discover that he was sharing her disappointment that her performance was not mentioned, in spite of the fact that he had been really annoyed by the perusal of the one paragraph in which it had been considered.

He looked up and found his father's eyes fixed on his with a humorous twinkle in them; and then both men laughed.

Carla was absorbed in her own thoughts and did not hear them.

CHAPTER III

The Brookfields lived in a spacious English-basement house on a Murray Hill corner, and the doctor had his office and his waiting-room on the ground floor. Immediately above was the large drawing-room on the Madison Avenue front, with a cozy library connecting it with the ample dining-room in the rear. The next floor the doctor had abandoned to his son and his son's wife and his son's child, taking for himself the corner room above theirs. Evert had protested in vain against his father's giving up of the apartment to which he had been accustomed.

"My dear Evert," the doctor had declared, "your wife is the lady of the house now, and I am only a guest in it. I want Carla to feel at home here; you see, she is the only woman who will ever have a home in this house now."

After Mrs. Jimmy Suydam had called on

Mrs. Evert Brookfield within the week following the Amateur Club's performance of the *Happy Pair*, the doctor asked his son if his plans for the new building of the Methuselah Life-Insurance Company had been accepted; and when he heard that they had not yet been passed upon by the executive committee, he had renewed his suggestion of a dinner for the president of the company and for the president's wife—a dinner of fourteen, which was as many as the dining-room would hold comfortably. Mr. and Mrs. Abram Carkendale had promptly accepted Mr. and Mrs. Evert Brookfield's invitation; and so had Mr. and Mrs. James Schuyler Suydam, although their acceptance was not quite so prompt. The Hon. Gilbert Barry, the young Irish philanthropist, had brought his American bride back to her own country for the winter, and they also accepted with pleasure. So did Mrs. Winston-Smith, and the Vicomte d'Armagnac, and Gurney Twiss, and the Bartlett girls, Miss Evangelyn Bartlett and Miss Kathryn Bartlett, who no longer cared for dances, but still liked to go to dinners.

Evert had gone with his wife to order the flowers, and when they were all seated at the dinner it had seemed to him that the roses spread a little too luxuriously, since they almost kept him from seeing Carla at the other end of the table. But before the dinner was over the young architect caught himself smiling at the thought that perhaps it was as well that the austere and mature Mrs. Carkendale was not as tall as he was, and therefore could not see how Carla was laying herself out to captivate Mr. Carkendale. Evert's admiration for his wife was boundless, and he was absolutely incapable of jealousy; but he was dumbly conscious of a wish that she would not appear quite so interested in what Mr. Carkendale was saying.

He felt sure that the president's conversation was not really as entertaining as any one must have supposed who judged only by her rapt attention. He could not guess that Mr. Carkendale, delighted at so sympathetic a listener, was talking about himself and about his success in life, and about his wife and her social ambition. Evert did not hear the president of the Methu-

selah Life say that "since Mrs. Carkendale joined the church, she has become such a society lady"; but Dr. Brookfield heard it, and so did Mrs. Gilbert Barry, who was an old friend of the doctor's, and they had not dared to look at each other for a minute or more.

Evert had been devoting himself to Mrs. Carkendale, and she had told him that she wanted to build a new house somewhere in the sixties or seventies, near Fifth Avenue. His professional instincts had waked at this, and he had got her to tell him what kind of a house it was she thought she wished, and had given to her half a dozen excellent suggestions so adroitly that she had supposed them to be her own.

When at last the ladies had risen, leaving the men to their cigars, Carla had whispered to her husband: "Talk to Mr. Carkendale now. I think he 'd do almost anything for you, if you take him right."

And while Evert was guiding the president of the Methuselah Life-Insurance Company into a conversation with the Hon. Gilbert Barry, in which Mr. Carkendale might have a chance to

supply the Irishman with needed information about the conflict of state laws regarding insurance, Carla, in the drawing-room, had come to the rescue of Mrs. Carkendale, who was being frozen by the stately Mrs. Winston-Smith, a lady who took her duty as a social leader very seriously, and who was always thinking it time that "the line must be drawn somewhere." She was engaged in drawing the line between herself and Mrs. Carkendale when the young hostess intervened and turned Mrs. Winston-Smith over to the Hon. Mrs. Gilbert Barry, to whom the stately dame was very gracious as to the daughter-in-law of an earl, not knowing that the earl's son's wife was a Southern girl who had for a year or two been a reporter on the New York newspapers.

Then Carla turned her batteries on the wife of the president, and told her how many interesting things Mr. Carkendale had explained to her during dinner, and how much she herself enjoyed meeting men who had really accomplished something in the world. When the elderly lady praised Evert in turn, and said how pleas-

ant it was to find an architect like Mr. Brookfield, who understood her ideas at once, Carla, in her surprise, almost spoiled everything by wanting to ask whether it was the president or the president's wife who was responsible for the new building of the Methuselah; but she bit the words off from the end of her tongue and let Mrs. Carkendale run on. When she discovered that it was a new house the president's wife had in mind, she took occasion to declare that it was astonishing how skilful Evert was in planning buildings as different as residences and skyscrapers, and she dwelt on his years in Paris at the Beaux Arts. Mrs. Carkendale listened, and said she supposed they did those things well in Paris, but she had always found the hotels there very uncomfortable, and without any of the conveniences she was accustomed to.

This gave the conversation a more intimate turn; and five minutes later, seeing all the other women talking languidly, Mrs. Winston-Smith and Mrs. Barry on one side, and on the other Mrs. Jimmy Suydam and the Bartlett girls, the

young hostess slipped out and took Mrs. Carkendale up-stairs, and showed her the baby fast asleep in his crib. When they came down-stairs again, two minutes before the gentlemen joined the ladies, Mrs. Carkendale felt as though she was going to make a very great friend of Mrs. Evert Brookfield, in spite of the difference of their ages. At first Mrs. Carkendale had been very conscious of the assured social position of the other guests, and she had stood somewhat aloof, as though it was their duty to make advances to her. But after the talk with the young hostess and after the visit to the nursery the president's wife ceased to hold herself on the defensive. When Carla took a seat by the Bartlett girls, Mrs. Carkendale dropped into easy conversation with Mrs. Suydam, and began to praise the Brookfield baby—"such a fine boy, and so handsome."

"He ought to be handsome," said Mrs. Jimmy, placidly. "Evert Brookfield is a very good-looking fellow himself. Just see how well he carries himself now."

Mrs. Carkendale was a little taken aback to

hear a woman thus frank in speaking of a man's appearance, but she did look at Evert as the men straggled in, and his manly figure filled her eye with pleasure.

As the men's voices had been heard from the library, the women had brightened visibly. Their conversation suddenly became animated. Evert's eyes were keen, and as he drew near his ear caught the change in the women's tones as they began to talk to the men.

He noted this heightening of the pitch in his wife's voice as D'Armagnac and Twiss captured the chairs nearest to her. Too wise to tell her that he had detected it, he resented a little the appealing note of Carla's speech when she was engaged in conversation with a man. He knew that she was very womanly, and he took this to be only another exhibition of the feminine habit of self-depreciation in the presence of the superior sex. Sometimes he had seen her apparently hanging on the words of some very ordinary male, of whom she was prompt to make fun when the man had gone. Perhaps no better evidence can be given of Evert Brookfield's wisdom than

his admission to himself that he did not really understand his wife.

So, as he was convoying Mr. Carkendale across to Mrs. Winston-Smith, he looked down and caught his wife's eye, and they exchanged a smile of confident happiness.

Mrs. Winston-Smith's manner was repellent more often than not, and on the present occasion Mr. Carkendale was a little overawed by it. After an interchange of chilly common-places, he turned from the stately dowager to the Hon. Mrs. Gilbert Barry, asking her how long she had been in the country and what she thought of America.

"Oh, I 'm an American myself," she replied promptly. "I 'm from the So'th, but I lived in New York for three or four years. I remember you, Mr. Carkendale, even if you don't remember me."

The president of the Methuselah Life could not recall any earlier meeting with Mrs. Barry.

Mrs. Barry laughed merrily. "I was n't Mrs. Barry then; I was a reporter for the *Gazette*, and I was sent up to get an interview out of you."

Mrs. Winston-Smith's expression was one of horrified amazement that the son of an English earl could have married a female reporter. Evert's face was grave, but his eye twinkled as he saw that Mrs. Winston-Smith had received a shock.

"You talked very easily," Mrs. Barry continued, "and it was good stuff, too. I was told to get two sticks, but I made it half a column, and it was n't cut down at all."

Mr. Carkendale was tactless enough to acknowledge that he remembered the interview printed in the *Gazette*,—about two years ago, was n't it?—but he did not recall the interviewer.

Evert left Mr. Carkendale and Mrs. Barry to right themselves as best they could, and took a seat beside Mrs. Winston-Smith.

"How lovely your wife looks to-night!" she began benignantly.

"Do you think so?" he returned, glancing across the room at Carla talking to Twiss and D'Armagnac and Jimmy Suydam and the Hon. Gilbert Barry, while his father was sitting with

the Bartlett girls on one side of him, and Mrs. Suydam and Mrs. Carkendale on the other.

"Don't you think so?" Mrs. Winston-Smith responded.

"Oh, yes," he answered. "I always think that she is lovely. But then I may be prejudiced in her favor."

"Apparently the rest of the men are also prejudiced in her favor to-night," Mrs. Winston-Smith replied. "But I don't wonder; she has such charming manners."

The husband of the woman thus directly complimented liked to hear her praised, but he preferred that the eulogy should not be quite so bald. He made no immediate response, and Mrs. Winston-Smith did her duty in keeping up the conversation.

"So few young women have any manners at all nowadays," she declared. "They have no deference for their elders—none at all. Now, when I was a girl—"

Evert Brookfield never learned what had happened to Mrs. Winston-Smith when she was a girl, for that lady interrupted herself abruptly

when she saw the four men around Mrs. Brookfield rise one after the other, saying in turn: "Please do, Mrs. Brookfield!"

"What is it they want your wife to do?" Mrs. Winston-Smith asked. "Not skirt-dancing, I hope? Nothing of that sort, I beg, although they do say it is done in the Prince's set in London."

Gurney Twiss and D'Armagnac came across to Evert.

"We want Mrs. Brookfield to recite," said the amateur actor.

"We ask her to say us something," the Frenchman added.

Evert was rejoiced always when his wife received attention. He liked to see her make an impression. He was glad of the pleasure it gave her; and he was quite aware also that it pleased him as well.

He crossed over to her. "Why don't you recite something, Carla?" he began.

"Oh, it 's our own house," she answered; "do you think it would be nice? Besides, I 'm not sure that I really remember anything. It is ever so long since I recited last."

"You must remember something," he urged; "there's that thing of Bret Harte's you recited for father a month or two ago."

"Oh, 'Her Letter,'" she responded, less doubtfully. "Well, I don't know but perhaps I could recite that—if you really insist"; and she looked around at the circle of men about her.

And all four of them assured her promptly that they really insisted.

She arose with a light little laugh, and the color deepened in her cheeks.

"If I must—" she said, as she walked toward the bay-window at the end of the room, the heavy curtains of which had been dropped. "But I don't think it is fair to ask me to try to recite now," she began, as she took her position before the draperies; "really I don't. I'm not at all sure that I remember it all. And it will be perfectly dreadful if I break down!"

Then she looked at the men who had besought her, and shook her head at them. "I shall never forgive you if I do," she added, "never, never!"

"But you won't break down," said her husband, encouragingly, as the men withdrew from that end of the room and took their seats by the side of the other women.

Evert's pulse quickened a little as he noticed the tremble in his wife's voice when she announced the title of the poem she was about to recite—"Her Letter." He remarked that she spoke the first stanza very fast:

"I 'm sitting alone by the fire,
Dressed just as I came from the dance,
In a robe even *you* would admire,—
It cost a cool thousand in France;
I 'm bediamonded out of all reason,
My hair is done up in a cue;
In short, sir, the 'belle of the season'
Is wasting an hour upon you."

Then her confidence came to her again, and the rest of the poem was spoken with less precipitation. Her husband listened to it with intense pleasure, although he knew that her delivery was not perfect and that it might even be called singsong. But in his eyes the woman

reciting was far more charming than the woman who was the heroine of the poem; and this would have satisfied him even if Carla had not been able to suggest the undercurrent of feeling flowing beneath the polished lines of the poet. A lump was ready to rise in his throat, and a tear almost came to his eye, when his wife recalled the memory

“Of the steps that we took to one fiddle,
Of the dress of my queer vis-à-vis;
And how I once went down the middle
With the man that shot Sandy McGee;

“Of the moon that was quietly sleeping
On the hill, when the time came to go;
Of the few baby peaks that were peeping
From under their bedclothes of snow;
Of the ride—that to me was the rarest;
Of—the something you said at the gate.
Ah! Joe, then I was n’t an heiress
To ‘the best-paying lead in the State.’”

When she finished, Evert had great difficulty in not leading the applause which broke out, and in which even Mrs. Suydam took part.

"Very pretty," said Mrs. Winston-Smith;
"very pretty indeed."

"Fetching, is n't it?" the Hon. Gilbert Barry asked his wife.

"I do wish Mrs. Brookfield would recite something else," Mrs. Barry urged.

"Say us something in French," said D'Armagnac.

"In French? before you?" Evert heard his wife answer, raising her eyes suddenly to the Frenchman's. "I'd never dare do that!"

"But you speak French so well," D'Armagnac returned. "You speak it in real Parisian."

"She is n't really afraid of you," Dr. Brookfield broke in. "You are a Frenchman, and of course you don't expect any of us Americans to speak French well. But we are all of us afraid of exposing our accents to one another. You can afford to be tolerant, but we are very exacting ourselves."

"Just to punish you," said his daughter-in-law, "I will try a French recitation—just to show you that I am not afraid of you."

"Brava!" cried the Frenchman.

There was a silence again as Mrs. Brookfield took her place once more before the curtains. Evert remarked how well the dark background brought out the graceful curves of her figure, robed in a blue-gray which she had discovered to be becoming to her.

"I don't know this at all," she began; "I'm sure I shall never get through with it. And I never could do it as it ought to be done, either."

Then she raised her voice a little and gave the title of her monologue: "Oh, Monsieur."

Her husband felt that she was sure of herself now, despite her disclaimer; and he knew how coquettishly she could deliver the clever lines of the French dramatist. Her accent was not perfect, of course, but Evert thought that it was unusually good for a foreigner.

When she made an end, the applause rose louder than before, and yet her husband was not quite satisfied. He did not know quite what he had expected, but he felt that those who had the privilege of hearing Carla recite ought to be even more enthusiastic.

"Those French chansonnettes are so amusing always," declared Mrs. Carkendale; and again the doctor's eyes met those of Mrs. Barry.

Mrs. Jimmy Suydam said quietly to Gurney Twiss, who was standing behind her sofa: "She did n't do that badly at all. Of course she is n't Reichemberg; but she 's a good deal better-looking, I must say. And she knows how to use her eyes, too!"

"Beautiful her eyes are, too, are n't they?" Twiss returned. "And I can't make out whether they are really green or not. What would you call them?"

Mrs. Suydam did not answer this question. She was staring at Twiss without seeing him, a trick of hers when she was deep in thought. "What was that play you wanted me to get up for you?" she asked at last.

"I 'm so glad you remembered that," the amateur actor replied. "It 's *Froufrou*; I 've wanted to do *Valréas* for years, and Mrs. Brookfield ought to do *Froufrou* superbly. She 'd need coaching, of course, but Sherrington and I could attend to that."

"Sherrington?" Mrs. Suydam repeated, in doubt.

"You don't know him, of course," Twiss explained. "He's the stage-manager of the Cosmopolitan Theater. If you get up a big play like *Froufrou*, you've got to have a good stage-manager who knows all the business of the different parts and can work up all the situations, you know."

"No," said Mrs. Jimmy, with a smile; "I don't know. I never had the energy to take part in private theatricals. *Tableaux vivants*, if you like—that's as far as I care to go. All I have to do then is to stand still."

Gurney Twiss saw his chance here. "All you have to do is to stand still and look lovely! I remember how beautiful it was when you did the *Duchess of Devonshire* two years ago."

"They made nearly three thousand dollars by those tableaux," said Mrs. Suydam, thoughtfully, taking all praise of her beauty as a matter of course. "The Working-girls' Rest and Recreation League needs ten thousand, at least,

to get its Summer Home, and we ought to have fifteen thousand if we can raise it."

"You get Mrs. Brookfield to play *Froufrou* at the Metropolitan, and you can fill the house at five dollars a ticket," declared Twiss, emphatically.

"You think so?" Mrs. Suydam returned, again staring at the amateur actor as she lost herself in thought.

"I 'm sure of it," he responded. "And we could give a very good performance, too. I'd have professionals for some of the parts; there are so few amateurs who will really work."

"And Mrs. Brookfield?" asked Mrs. Suydam, coming out of her abstraction. "Would she be willing to act at the Metropolitan?"

"Why not?" he answered. "It 's for charity."

"Yes," she rejoined, with a smile; "but would Evert Brookfield be as charitable as all that? He might not like to see his wife acting at the Metropolitan."

"Why should n't he like it?" Twiss replied. "We 'd give a very good show, I 'm sure. It

would be the society success of the winter. Of course he 'd like it."

"I 'm not so sure of that," Mrs. Jimmy returned, looking across the room at Evert, who happened just then to be talking to her husband. "He looks as if he had a will of his own and liked to have his own way."

"I am sure of it," Twiss retorted. "Men like to have their wives admired."

"Some men do," she answered calmly, "and some men might think that the admiration of an opera-houseful was perhaps a little too much of a good thing."

"Well, Mrs. Brookfield would like to do *Froufrou*; I 'm sure of that, anyway," urged the amateur. "And if she wants to, she can coax him into letting her, can't she?"

"Very likely," Mrs. Jimmy admitted placidly. "All that will be none of my business. What I want is to make ten thousand dollars for my working-girls. I should n't wonder if you were right in thinking that we could get a good deal of money by giving a performance at the Metropolitan; and Mrs. Brookfield certainly is

very attractive—especially to men. I wonder if she really would play *Froufrou* for us?"

"You can persuade her, if anybody can," Twiss rejoined; "and I don't believe it will be such very hard work, either."

"I suppose I've got to get up something since I've let them make me president of the league," she confessed, as though weary of the subject already.

"I do wish you would!" pleaded Gurney Twiss.

Mrs. Jimmy smiled condescendingly. "Do you want me to make money for the working-girls, or do you want to play—*Val*—what is his name?"

"*Valréas*," he corrected. "I do want to play *Valréas*. But I'm certain you would make a lot of money for your working-girls."

"Well, I'll think about it," Mrs. Suydam said, as though to close the discussion.

"Won't you ask her to-night?" he suggested.

"No," was the quiet answer; "that would not be quite fair, would it?"

There was a movement among the other

guests, and Mrs. Carkendale rose to take her leave. Then the Hon. Gilbert Barry carried off his wife, and the Vicomte D'Armagnac and Gurney Twiss went with them. Mr. and Mrs. James Schuyler Suydam were the next to go, and she asked what day her hostess was at home, and promised to call next week, as there was a charity she was trying to interest her friends in.

Mrs. Winston-Smith had agreed to drop the Bartlett girls on her way home.

Evert Brookfield escorted her to the door, and he did not hear the whispers of the two unmarried ladies as they followed Mrs. Winston-Smith down-stairs.

"What did you think of those recitations?" asked Miss Evangelyn. "Quite professional in her accomplishments, is n't she?"

"It's always a pity to see a married woman so anxious for admiration," answered Miss Kathryn.

"And so ready to ask for it from any man who happens to be within reach," Miss Evan-

gelyn continued. "I 'm afraid her head is getting turned."

"You mark my words," Miss Kathryn declared, "that Mrs. Brookfield will go on the stage sooner or later. You see if she does n't."

CHAPTER IV

Within the next few weeks Evert Brookfield saw various things happen. Under the influence of Mr. Carkendale, the building committee of the board of trustees of the Methuselah Life-Insurance Company intrusted to Jones & Brookfield the preparation of plans and designs for a fifteen-story fire-proof steel-frame building to cover a whole Broadway block in one of the most conspicuous positions between Wall Street and the City Hall; and for the first time since their association Evert and his partner faced the hitherto unsolved problem of the skyscraper. And under the influence of Mrs. Carkendale, the president of the Methuselah Life-Insurance Company bought a corner lot on Fifth Avenue, not far from Seventy-second Street, with a frontage of fifty feet on Central Park; and Jones & Brookfield were called

upon also to prepare the design and plans for the sumptuous residence in which Mr. and Mrs. Carkendale proposed to entertain the most exclusive circles of New York society.

When Evert reported these two commissions one after another at the family dinner-table, his wife was greatly gratified.

"Who says I am not a real help to my husband?" she asked. "That horrid old man would never have given it to you if I had n't been so nice to him."

"And how were you nice to him?" asked the doctor. "I watched you, and you pretended to be interested in life-insurance, and you confessed a shameful ignorance about it, and you coaxed him to explain it to you at great length."

"Did I?" she inquired innocently, and then she flamed up. "How can you say such horrid things about me?" Almost immediately she added, lowering her voice: "But he liked it! Men always do like it when I ask them to explain things."

Dr. Brookfield smiled at her indulgently. "You were nice to the old man," he declared,

"and Evert was nice to the old woman. I heard that she told somebody that Evert was one of the most charming young men she had met in society, and one of the best-looking, too."

"Of course he is," Carla retorted—"as if I did n't know that better than anybody else. But you could n't make me jealous of any old frump like that! And I was nice to her, too—just as nice as I knew how. And, Evert, when you get the plans for her old house done, you just let me see them, and I 'll help you again. I know her, and I can tell you just the kind of house she'd like to have—see if I can't! She's the sort of woman who will want closets everywhere—even in the parlor!"

The firm of Jones & Brookfield had recently completed a church at Tarrytown and a library at Yonkers; they were half-way through with a secret-society hall at New Haven and with two apartment-houses on the Riverside Drive; they had no other important commissions on hand, and they turned all their energies on the two new buildings.

Yet Evert yielded to his wife's wish to go to Tuxedo over New Year's. It happened that a jolly company was gathered in the club-house that week. When a rainy Saturday followed a rainy Friday, and a new diversion became imperative, Rupert de Ruyter improvised a parody on a popular play, and it was acted without a single rehearsal and with the most satisfactory applause. Of course Carla had been the central figure of this impromptu performance, and of course, also, the society reporters had made the most of the affair.

Echoes of it reverberated in the Sunday newspapers for two or three weeks. Evert and his wife read all these paragraphs together under the tolerant eyes of Dr. Brookfield. Evert found a shamefaced pleasure in the perusal; but Carla was perfectly frank in her delight when she was plentifully praised, and revealed an equally frank grief when she was slighted or slurred. The most of the articles were highly complimentary, not to call them fulsome.

Whatever the degree of flattery, Carla swal-

lowed it greedily; but Evert noticed that it did not make her conceited at all. She got enjoyment out of this frequent praise; but Evert could not discover that it affected her own opinion of herself. It seemed to him that she was swimming on the flood-tide of social success and that she found the exercise exhilarating.

Evert drew his father's attention to this one evening about the middle of February, when they were smoking their after-dinner cigars in the library, and while Carla was seated on the arm of Evert's chair.

"Yes," the doctor answered; "I'm glad to say that I've never seen Carla looking so well."

"That 's because I 'm so happy," she asserted.

Dr. Brookfield peered at her solemnly, and returned: "You are happy, in spite of the fact that for the last two years your husband has been in love with a married woman?"

She gazed at her father-in-law for a puzzled moment, and then her laughter rippled out.

"Me?" she cried; "and I'm in love with a married man!" And she ran her fingers lightly



“‘AND I’M IN LOVE WITH A MARRIED MAN’”

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through her husband's pointed beard—a little trick of hers, which always gave him a thrill of pleasure.

Evert looked at his father and caught the doctor's eyes (sad often, although the mouth might be merry); and he knew that his father had a share in the peace and pleasure of his home.

"What was I going to say?" asked Carla, fixing her gaze on the doctor.

"How can I guess that, my dear," he answered, "seeing that you are a woman?"

"Oh, I know," she went on, ignoring his gentle gibe. "I was saying that I am happy. Well, I am, and why should n't I be? I've got everything I want, have n't I?" And she gave a little pull at the point of her husband's beard.

"I know I have," Evert answered, slipping his arm around her waist.

"And I never used to have anything I wanted when I was younger, so I suppose I enjoy everything more now," she continued. "You can't imagine how stupid my life was when I was a girl all alone on that stock-farm.

Grandpa was very good to me, and he gave me all he could. But he could n't give me New York, could he? And that was what I wanted! I used to read the papers, all about the good times girls were having here in New York, how they were going to balls and to the opera and to the theater and to big dinners with vaudeville afterward and all that sort of thing, and it used to make me sick to think that I was never going to see life that way. I did n't know why I had n't as good a right to have a good time as Mrs. Jimmy Suydam. Mrs. Jimmy!" and she broke again into laughter. "Do you know what I did once? I was so mad to think that she had all these things that I wanted, that I cut her picture out of the paper—and stuck it full of pins! Was n't that mean?"

"It was devilish!" the doctor declared.

"Was n't it?" she returned. "I don't believe I can ever forgive myself for doing that, and I did n't hurt her a bit, either. And now I don't envy her any more. I've got more than she has now. If I'm not as handsome as she is,

I'm younger, and my husband is better-looking and more of a man. And then there's the baby—Mrs. Jimmy Suydam would give her good looks and her money and everything to have a baby! I'm sorry for her now, really I am, and I'm beginning to like her, too. And I used to hate her!"

"You used to hate her," said the doctor. "Quite so. But that was when you were unhappy. Now you are happy, you don't hate anybody?"

"Of course I don't," Carla answered. "Why should I?"

"Why should you, indeed?" Dr. Brookfield returned. "It is not assured that good people are always happy, but it is certain that happy people are good."

"I am, anyhow," was her reply. "I want other people to have as good a time as I am having. And I want to go on having a good time myself. The things I went without as a girl—dinners and dances and the opera and all that—I want them now. I suppose I may get tired of them some day, but I'm not tired yet.

And I shall never be young again, shall I? Sometimes I feel now as if I was getting old ever so fast, and I am twenty-four, you know."

"The years fly very swiftly indeed," her father-in-law asserted solemnly, "and in thirty or forty years you will be really an old woman."

"I have got a little time before me, have n't I?" she asked, with another little laugh. "My hair is n't going to turn gray yet awhile. But, after all, it may be becoming; I've seen old ladies that were really very good-looking—women of thirty-five and forty."

"Even gray hair will be becoming to you," said her husband. "Everything is becoming to you."

"Oh, dear, no," she returned promptly. "Freckles are not; and I used to have ever so many. And I remember how I cried once when I teased an old Irishwoman's cat, and she came out and chased me away and told me to go home and wash the fly-specks off my face."

"That was a sad experience, I don't doubt," Dr. Brookfield remarked, "but it makes a good

story now your freckles have vanished. It's odd how we find pleasure in talking about ourselves and our doings, while it is sad enough to have to think about ourselves and about what we have done and left undone."

"I don't want to think about what I have n't done," she cried, with a wilful toss of her head. "I want to go on doing something."

"Evert," said his father, solemnly, "do you know what has befallen you? You have married a young woman who has never sowed her wild oats. As a girl Carla did not have her proper proportion of youthful amusement, and that is why she is going to lead you a pretty dance now!"

"Evert is n't afraid of that," she declared, and her husband's arm tightened about her waist. "Evert is a man, and men always understand me better than women—ever so much better! I'm so glad you and Evert and the baby are all masculine! I don't think I really like women—not but what the women up here in New York are all very nice to me."

"All the men up here in New York are very

nice to you, too, are they not?" asked the doctor, with his quizzical smile.

Carla gave a little laugh, redolent of happiness and health; and then she gazed at her father-in-law roguishly, and said: "You are nice to me—and you are one man, at least."

"Don't look at me like that!" Dr. Brookfield protested. "You must n't waste your fascinations on me; I have n't any house for Evert to build. You ought to remember that I am only the baby's grandfather!"

She laughed again; and then she got up and went over to the doctor. Leaning her elbows on the back of his arm-chair, she said in low, caressing tones: "You are the only father I can remember, and it is part of my happiness now that you have received me as a daughter."

The doctor raised his hand and took hold of hers and kissed it. To Evert this was the one thing that seemed to make the moment perfect.

There was an interval of silence, and then Carla, still leaning on the doctor's chair, asked: "What do you think of this new idea of Mrs. Jimmy's? She wants to have us act a play of

some sort for that charity of hers; she says it needs ever so much money."

"All charities always need ever so much money," dryly rejoined the doctor; "and amateur performances always need ever so much charity."

"That 's just what I told her," Carla explained. "I said I 'd never dare to play in a five-act piece."

Evert listened in doubt. He did not know what to do. He was not sure that he wanted to see his wife act again; and yet he wished her to do whatever would give her pleasure.

"Five acts?" he repeated. "Is n't that rather a heavy contract for amateurs?"

"There 's a three-act play they were talking about, too," Carla answered; "but I like the five-act one better."

"What are the plays?" Evert asked.

"The three-act one is that Ibsen piece," she responded; "you know—the one in which she dances—"

"You mean the *Doll's House*, I suppose?" Evert replied.

"That 's it," cried Carla. "It 's a horrid piece, is n't it? I could n't act a part like that. I don't see how any woman could leave her husband and her children that way, do you? It 's perfectly unnatural. But of course the scene where she dances for her husband is pretty, although I can't understand how she could love a man like that, so mean and contemptible. Now, in the other play the husband is really a fine fellow."

"And what is the other play?" Evert inquired.

"Did n't I tell you?" she replied innocently. "How absurd of me! It 's *Froufrou*. But of course it 's perfectly ridiculous for me to think of playing a five-act piece like that, when I 've really had so little experience."

It struck Evert that his wife was raising these objections to her performance in the expectation that he or his father would promptly explain them away. The two men kept silent, as it chanced; and Carla, leaving her position behind Dr. Brookfield, took a seat on the sofa between her husband and her father-in-law,

tucking one of her feet under her—a favorite posture of hers.

“I told Mrs. Jimmy,” she went on at last, “that there was no use talking; I would n’t do it—or, at least, I could n’t do it. The very idea of five acts is terrible, is n’t it? I don’t see why I should scare myself half to death just for Mrs. Jimmy’s working-girls, do you? If she wants to make a lot of money, why does n’t she act *Froufrou* herself?”

“You did n’t suggest that to her?” the doctor asked.

“Of course not,” she returned. “And after all, Mrs. Jimmy could n’t play *Froufrou*, could she? *Froufrou* is young and lively and—and—”

When she hesitated for her next word, the doctor helped her out: “And as pretty as Carla Brookfield!”

“Well,” she replied, with her silvery laugh, “I do think the riding-habit in the first act would be becoming to me, although I ’m not quite as thin as I used to be.”

“In short,” said Dr. Brookfield, with his tolerant smile, “you have made up your mind to

play the great part, and you would like Evert and me to persuade you?"

"How can you say such things?" she asked indignantly, and her voice trembled a little. "I don't see how you can pretend to like me, and all the time you are thinking me insincere and deceitful! Besides, I told you I told her I could n't think of playing a great big part like *Froufrou!*"

"She did n't give it up, did she?" asked the doctor.

"No," Carla responded. "I must say she was very nice about it, very nice indeed. She encouraged me and said lots of pleasant things. Then she explained how it was her working-girls were so hard up this year and how difficult it was to raise money."

"That is to say," Dr. Brookfield returned, "she tried to make out that it was your duty to act *Froufrou?*"

"She did n't put it that way exactly," was the answer, "but she made me feel I should be rather mean if I backed out now after she had gone so far."

"How far had she gone?" was the doctor's next question.

"She has engaged the stage-manager, a Mr. Sherrington," was her answer; "they say he's very good indeed, and it's a great privilege to have him take charge of a play. And she and Gurney Twiss have talked it all over, and they have picked out somebody for every one of the parts; and they insist that there is n't anybody else to play *Froufrou*, and if I refuse they'll have to give the whole thing up."

"All Mrs. Jimmy has done is to engage this Sherrington," said Evert, who had been listening in silence; "and I don't suppose—"

"But that is n't all she's done," interrupted his wife. "She's engaged the Opera-House and—"

"The Opera-House?" repeated Evert. "The Metropolitan Opera-House?"

"It is large, is n't it?" Carla responded, and the dimple that Evert loved appeared at last. "But she says that if she wants to make a lot of money for her working-girls, we must have a theater that will hold a lot of people."

"Evidently Mrs. Jimmy has a good deal of executive ability," said the doctor.

"Yes, has n't she?" answered his daughter-in-law. "That's what everybody said when she took hold of this league of hers and reorganized it and did everything."

"She wants you to do something now," Evert interjected.

"It is n't fair to make her do it all, is it?" Carla asked. "But I don't want you to suppose I want to play *Froufrou* at the Metropolitan. I'd be too scared, I'm sure. I'd never get through the first act. I don't believe I'd remember the first word of my part."

"That would not matter, my dear," said the doctor. "Like every other woman, you would make sure of the last word."

"Now, that's not at all kind of you," she declared. "I come to you for advice, and you don't help me at all; you just make fun of me. I think you ought to take me very seriously if I can play *Froufrou* and make five thousand dollars for charity."

Dr. Brookfield looked at his son with an

indulgent smile, which Evert was at no loss to interpret. It seemed to her husband that Carla had made up her own mind that she would enjoy acting *Froufrou*, and that she was now appealing to them for a formal approval of her intention. He did not know just what he wanted himself, although he probably would prefer her not to appear in public; his impulse always was to give her at once whatever she wanted, and to take his reward in observing her pleasure.

"When have you to decide?" he asked.

"Why, I told you I told her I could n't think of it," she answered. "But I'm going to lunch there to-morrow."

"Evert," inquired his father, with every appearance of intense seriousness, "do you think that your wife has any right to refuse to make five thousand dollars for charity?"

"I said five thousand," she broke in, "but Mrs. Jimmy hopes it will be ten thousand at least."

"I repeat my question," the doctor went on. "Don't you consider that it is Carla's plain

duty to sacrifice her own feelings and to conquer her timidity and to wrestle with her reluctance?"

"Now, you are making fun of me again," she cried; and Evert noticed the elation in her voice, as though she knew already that the victory was hers.

"Yes," he said, in answer to his father's question. "I suppose we may look upon it as settled."

"But I don't," Carla declared. "I have n't made up my own mind yet! I'm not at all sure that I really want to play *Froufrou*, after all!"

"You are a good girl, and you will do your duty," said the doctor, with humorous emphasis. "Besides, I hold *Froufrou* to be the most moral play of our time—"

"Why, how can you say so?" she interrupted. "She runs away from her husband: it's true he's ever so tiresome, always prosing and being good, but she does run away from him, and he kills the other man, and she dies, and he forgives her before she dies. Oh, that last act is per-

fectly lovely! When I read it I had a good cry all by my lonesome."

"What is the plot of *Froufrou*?" the doctor insisted. "There are two sisters, the grave *Louise* and the flibbertigibbet *Froufrou*, as *Gilberte* is nicknamed; and there are two men equally sharply contrasted, the serious *Sartorys* and the lively *Valréas*, both of whom are in love with *Froufrou*. The elder sister has thought that *Sartorys* was about to propose to her, but when she finds it is *Froufrou* he wants, she sacrifices herself and persuades *Gilberte* to accept him—"

"Noble of her, was n't it?" interrupted Carla.

"Absurd of her, I should say," the doctor insisted. "If you judge the act by its results, it was positively wicked, for it brought about the misery of *Sartorys*, the degradation of *Froufrou*, and the death of *Valréas*. That's why I hold *Froufrou* is a moral play, because it brings out clearly the evil effects of self-sacrifice. There is nothing more unwholesome than the morbid desire some women have to be unselfish. *Froufrou* is a case in point. If

Louise had not enjoyed giving up to her sister the one man she loved and her sister did not love, all would have gone well—but there would have been no play."

"And that would be a pity, would n't it?" *Carla* returned. "It is a beautiful play, I think, and I just love that last act. I've never had to die before, and I wonder how it will feel to pretend to be dead."

"That is a case where the imitation is preferable to the real thing," said the doctor.

"Ugh!" cried the young wife, with a little shiver. "I hate the very thought of death, don't you? I don't think I shall really like even to make believe."

"Are you sure you will enjoy the whole thing?" asked *Evert*. "It is not too late for you to give it up now."

"The idea!" she said quickly. "Give it up now, after I've had all the trouble of getting you to agree to it!"

The doctor and his son laughed together at this self-revelation, and *Carla* joined in their merriment.

"Evert," said Dr. Brookfield at last, "here is where you made your mistake. As I told you just now, you have committed the irretrievable error of marrying a woman who did not sow her wild oats as a girl!"

CHAPTER V

Evert Brookfield had always thought of Mrs. Jimmy Suydam as an easy-going woman, languid, not to say lazy, and too well satisfied with herself and with what she possessed ever to make any effort for anything more. But it soon became evident that, since she accepted the presidency of the Working-girls' Rest and Recreation League, and determined that the best way to raise money for her society was by getting up an amateur performance of *Froufrou*, she had unexpected energy and remarkable executive ability. She knew what she wanted, and she got it. She did not hurry, and she was not fussy, and she never fidgeted her allies; but she had the knack of getting others to do the work she wished to have done. She kept them up to the mark without apparent exertion; and as Evert observed the operation

of these invaluable qualities, he recalled a remark of his father's, who was her physician, to the effect that Mrs. Jimmy's was one of the best-ordered households in New York.

Although Evert had yielded his consent to his wife's appearing as *Froufrou*, he would not have been grieved if the performance had been abandoned. But Mrs. Suydam would not let herself be daunted by difficulties, although two of these arose, either of which might well have wrecked the enterprise. There was no amateur actress of New York available for the important part of *Louise*, the sister of the heroine; and Mrs. Jimmy, urged by Gurney Twiss, whose heart would have broken had the performance been given up, and advised also by the stage-manager, Sherrington, whom Twiss had recommended to her, had promptly asked Miss Margaret Archibald to play the part. And when the amateur who was to act the hero, Dick de Ruyter, the brother of the novelist, was suddenly sent to Mexico by his employers, and had therefore to return his part only the day before the first rehearsal, Mrs. Suydam,

again advised by Mr. Sherrington, had requested the assistance of Mr. Gordon Scott. Now, Miss Archibald and Mr. Scott were not amateurs; they were professional actors; and they happened both of them to be out of an engagement in the middle of the winter only because of the serious illness of a distinguished tragedian to whose company they had belonged.

Evert did not quite like the quasi-professional flavor thus given to the entertainment. But his wife assured him that it was too late for her to back out now, even if she wanted to do so, and she did not want; in fact, she rather thought it would be nice to have professionals, since this might make the papers pay more attention to the performance. For her part, she was tired of all this gossip about society-ladies and club-men, and she only waited for an opportunity to show them all that she could really act *Froufrou*. She asserted that she did not want to be boastful, but she was not afraid of Miss Archibald's outshining her—*Froufrou* was an ever so much better part, and *Louise* was not on at all in the fourth act, and even in the big scene in the third

act *Froufrou* had the best of it, and *Louise* was only a feeder.

"A feeder?" Evert had repeated curiously.

And she had to explain that that was what professionals called a character who is of secondary importance. As for Mr. Gordon Scott, she went on, it was true that Dick de Ruyter would have looked the part all right, and he might have played it after a fashion; but if *Froufrou* was to have a chance at all, she ought to be well supported. Amateurs like little Gurney Twiss were all very well for parts like *Valréas*, but the husband was ever so much more important, and she would have a great deal more confidence in the success of the show if *Sartorys* was in the hands of an experienced actor.

"You will see that I'm right," she concluded, "at the first rehearsal."

"You don't want me to go to the rehearsals, do you?" he asked, in astonishment.

"Of course I do," she returned. "I want you to go everywhere with me. And I'd never dare face all those people I don't know, if you were n't there."

Evert was very busy just then, and his mornings were precious to him; but he sacrificed himself to his wife and went to the first rehearsal, which was held, not at the Metropolitan Opera-House, but at the Cosmopolitan Theater, where Sherrington was the stage-manager.

It was just eleven on a sloppy, foggy morning in January when Evert and Carla stepped out of their coupé at the stage-entrance of the Cosmopolitan Theater, hidden away down a side street.

They pushed through a swing-door, and were halted by a harsh voice from a sort of sentry-box on one side.

"What do you want?" asked the voice, which belonged to a wizened little old man.

"Is this the Cosmopolitan Theater?" Carla inquired, bestowing one of her best smiles on the doorkeeper.

"It is that," he answered less gruffly. "And what is it you want here?"

"There is to be a rehearsal here to-day—a rehearsal of *Froufrou*," she responded, smiling again; "Mr. Sherrington has arranged and—"

"Oh, it's to-day them amachures begins, is it? I clane forgot it. Is it amachures ye are? Well, go on, then; and take care of the step at the turn there."

Mr. and Mrs. Evert Brookfield went on down a dark passage.

Carla clutched her husband's arm and gave a little laugh of delight, and said: "Is n't this fun? It's ever so much better than going to the sewing-class Mrs. Winston-Smith wanted me to join."

"It would be just as much fun if the architect had planned a decent entrance here," replied Evert. "But I suppose he had to save all the space he could."

They went through another swing-door, and they found themselves on the stage. The light, which came from an immense skylight, was dim; and they did not know just where to go. Scenery was leaning against the brick wall on one side of them, and on the other was a frail flight of steps, painted to resemble marble, and thrust up against an immense mantelpiece apparently of richly carved oak.

As their eyes became more accustomed to the light, they were able to make out Mrs. Suydam and Mr. Twiss standing near a table on one side of the stage, just in front of the dead footlights.

"I 'm really frightened now," said Carla to her husband. "But I like it! Maybe I 'll make a big hit, and then they 'll want me to go on the stage for good and all. How would you like me to be a great actress?"

"I should n't like it at all," he responded promptly.

"How selfish you men are!" she laughed back at him, as Mrs. Jimmy came forward to greet them.

"You are exactly on time," said the organizer of the entertainment. "I wish all the rest were!"

"That 's the worst thing about amateurs," Gurney Twiss admitted. "They are not as punctual as professionals. Now, I 'm always prompt on the minute, and I 'm always letter-perfect at the first rehearsal. Why, I remember once—it was the last time we did the *School*



"YOU ARE EXACTLY ON TIME."

for Scandal, and I was *Charles*, of course, and Dick de Ruyter was *Joseph*, and—”

A short man with grayish hair and a determined jaw was coming toward them, and when Twiss saw the new-comer he interrupted his autobiographic narrative and cried: “Here ’s Mr. Sherrington.”

Evert noted the contrast between the two men as they shook hands—the amateur actor slight and eager and restless, the stage-manager stocky and quiet and almost slow.

Mrs. Jimmy presented “Mr. Sherrington, who is kind enough to stage-manage our little play for us—Mrs. Brookfield, Mr. Brookfield.”

Evert saw the sharp scrutiny Sherrington bestowed on Carla, as though to gage her histrionic faculty at a glance.

Carla smiled graciously, as usual, and shook hands cordially. “I’m afraid of you already, Mr. Sherrington—Mr. Twiss tells me you are very strict. I hope you won’t be too hard on me.”

It seemed to Evert that he could almost see the aggressiveness of Sherrington melting away before Carla’s imploring gaze.

"I 've got to keep everybody up to the mark," the stage-manager answered. "But I 'm not as ferocious as all that."

A tall, slight woman of perhaps thirty, with ashen-gold hair, came on the stage, and stood alone for a moment, looking about her as though she knew no one there. She was dressed in black, and her gown fitted her so well as to deserve record.

Mrs. Suydam caught sight of her. "That 's Miss Archibald, is n't it?" she asked Sherrington.

The stage-manager turned and greeted the new-comer: "Good morning, my dear. You 're on time. Let me make you acquainted with Mrs. Suydam, who has charge of the performance; and this is Mrs. Brookfield, who is going to do *Froufrou*."

The ladies bowed to each other, and the stage-manager continued his introductions with a certain manner of his own: "Mr. Brookfield, Mr. Twiss—Miss Archibald."

"I know Mr. Twiss already," said the actress, extending her hand to the amateur; and Evert

perceived at once that her voice, which was neither rich nor resonant, had been carefully trained.

The other amateurs who were to play the rest of the parts in the play arrived one after another; they were mostly members of Twiss's club, and they were acquainted with one another. They were all introduced to Mrs. Brookfield and to Miss Archibald and to Mr. Gordon Scott, who was a little late.

Evert was inclined to dislike the actor at first sight; and yet he recognized that Gordon Scott was presentable, not to say good-looking, with a dark eye, a full lip, a high color, and curly black hair. It seemed to Evert that the actor was playing the part of a gentleman, whereas Miss Archibald had struck him as quite lady-like.

He saw that Carla dropped into conversation with Scott, and that she was smiling on him as she could not help smiling at every man coming within her radius. He saw that Scott's rather dull eye had brightened, and that the actor was gazing at Carla with obvious admiration. He

wished that he and his wife had nothing to do with this absurd performance, semi-amateur and semi-professional, or, at least, that the whole thing was over and ended and forgotten. Then he observed all the signs of Carla's excited enjoyment, and he revoked his wish, admitting the selfishness of it.

He heard Sherrington say to Mrs. Suydam, "We are all here now, I think?" And when Mrs. Suydam assented, after counting her flock, the stage-manager clapped his hands and called out, "First act!"

There was a movement of expectancy, and those who were not to appear in the earlier scenes went to the right or to the left. Then Sherrington had the stage-attendants arrange a sofa or two and half a dozen chairs to suggest the furniture of the *Baron's* drawing-room. Evert had supposed that the scenery would be set for each act, and he found the bare stage distinctly disenchanting. He glanced around at the scenes piled against the unplastered walls and suspended far above their heads by abundant cordage, and he thought it would be about

as picturesque to rehearse on the deck of an ocean steamer as in this barren void.

And the stage-manager was as autocratic as any ship-captain. He had studied out the whole play, and he knew all the parts, and he had decided just how he wanted every one of them played, and just what groups he wanted formed in each of the succeeding scenes. He told the performers where they were supposed to enter the drawing-room, and how they were to enter, and where they were to stand, and when they were to sit. He insisted on the intonations and the gestures he preferred; in short, he taught them all how he wanted them to act.

Froufrou appears for a few minutes only in the opening scene, and when she had made her exit Carla came to her husband and sat down by him on a stray sofa near the proscenium arch.

"I like that Mr. Sherrington," she began; "he was very nice to me, and encouraging, for all they say he runs things with a high hand. And I like Mr. Scott, too, don't you?"

"Mr. Scott is the actor who is to play *Sar-*

torys," Evert inquired, "the one with the curly hair and the big black eyes?"

"That 's so; he has handsome eyes, since you draw my attention to them," his wife went on. "He is rather good-looking generally. I must say I like a man to be good-looking. It 's something in his favor, anyway. And I don't wonder the matinée girls go wild over Mr. Scott. Gurney Twiss says he 's been divorced twice and he 's now paying alimony to two wives! That 's horrid, is n't it? But maybe it was their fault, after all. There are some women I know I don't see how any man could live with more than a month."

"And you think Mr. Scott may have been unfortunate enough to have married two such women in succession?" Evert replied. "Perhaps so; but it is against the theory of chances."

"Well, that Miss Archibald has had two husbands, too, for all she looks so like a girl; I 'm sure she laces, and that can't be good for the voice," declared Carla. "But she has n't been divorced. Both of her husbands died. Gurney

Twiss says that her life is a most romantic story. Now, I don't think she looks romantic at all; she might be one of those girls with good figures who show off cloaks at the dressmakers', might n't she? But Mr. Scott is romantic-looking, if you like."

"He does suggest a corsair or a bandit, or something of that sort," Evert returned.

"He 's a great favorite with girls," Carla went on. "Gurney Twiss says his photographs sell better than anybody else's; they can't get enough of them. I don't believe Miss Archibald's do. Gurney Twiss says that she is a most accomplished actress, but very cold. She has n't any spontaneity. That 's why she 's a hoodoo."

"A hoodoo?" asked Evert, in amazement. "What do you mean?"

"She 's unlucky," Carla answered; "that 's what Gurney Twiss says. The pieces she is in never run. Managers are beginning to be afraid of engaging her. The critics praise her art, but she does n't attract the public. Now, I 'd like the critics to praise my art, of course, but if I

were an actress I should n't like to feel I kept people out of the theater."

This was the second time that Carla had spoken of herself as an actress, and again the suggestion jarred on Evert. He looked at her, and the protest he had framed died on his lips. He had never seen her to such advantage, with the glow of excitement on her cheeks and its glitter in her eyes.

"If you look like that when you play *Frou-frou*," he said at last, "the critics will fall before you like ninepins."

"I hope so," she laughed back at him. "And by the way, Evert, I want you to be very particularly nice to any of those newspaper people you meet. They 'll be coming here to get the latest news about the performance, you know, and they may come to the house, too—"

"To the house?" echoed her husband. "What for?"

"Oh, just to interview me, or something of that sort," she explained. "I should dearly love to be interviewed. And Gurney Twiss says everything depends on the way you treat

them when they come. If you are not nice to them, they jump on you."

"I should like to see anybody jump on you, as you call it," said Evert.

"If you don't want them to, you've got to be very friendly with any of them that call," Carla replied. "Give them a cigar and jolly them up."

"Jolly them up?" repeated her husband.

"Yes," she returned; "and if they go away happy, they will boom me. And I do so want to be boomed!"

Before Evert could frame any answer to this strange desire of his wife's, Sherrington cried, "*Froufrou!*" And Carla jumped, and ran toward those who were rehearsing.

"You enter up right there, my dear," said the stage-manager—"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Brookfield!"

"It does n't matter at all," laughed Carla, going up the stage to the point indicated.

"That's it," said Sherrington. "You wait for your cue, and then you make your entrance."

It pleased Evert to see how swiftly Carla

followed the stage-manager's directions and how quickly she grasped his suggestions. In general the amateurs were rather fussy, and they could not always see the reason for Sherrington's orders, and sometimes they wanted to stop and argue. The two professional performers did as they were bid at once, seeing instantly the significance of every suggestion. And they acted even at this first rehearsal; they read their lines with the intonation of the actual performance. The amateurs would not or could not do this; they were self-conscious; one of them said it would "be all right at night."

Sherrington retorted promptly: "It will be all right at night if it is all right at rehearsal. I don't want anything left to the 'inspiration of the moment.' That's a horse that kicks you off when you're on the narrow part of the bridge. If we get everything out of the act at rehearsal, I'm not afraid of the 'inspiration of the moment'; it can't do much harm then."

It struck Evert that the difference between the amateurs and the professionals was not unlike that between volunteers and regulars,

and that the amateurs were perhaps more self-conscious than usual because of the presence of the other two. They liked this association; they were proud of it; but they were a little intimidated by it. Then Evert turned his attention to Miss Archibald and to Mr. Scott, and he wondered whether they were deriving any gratification from their association with representatives of the more exclusive circles of New York society. In the actor he fancied he could perhaps detect a hint of this snobbishness, but not in the actress. She was inscrutable, as women so often are; and she went through her part with perfect courtesy to all the others, treating Carla just as she treated the rest of them.

After the first two acts had been rehearsed very slowly and with manifold interruptions of all sorts, Sherrington declared himself very well satisfied with the beginning they had made, and asked them all to be there promptly the next morning at the same hour.

"I have my carriage," said Mrs. Jimmy to the Brookfields, as they went toward the door that led into the passageway; "let me take you

home. It's on my way, you know. And you too, Mr. Twiss?"

They accepted, all three of them; and Gurney Twiss said to Mrs. Suydam: "Was n't I right to have you engage Sherrington? He knows how to get work out of everybody. And he's very quick, too. I told him about my conception of the part of *Valréas*, and he said it was all right."

"I like him, too," said Carla. "And I'm not half as much afraid of him as I thought I should be!"

Mrs. Jimmy laughed in her calm way.

"I'm not sure," she commented, "that he is n't a little afraid of you!"

"The idea!" returned Carla; but she did not ask to have the suggestion explained.

As the four passed through the swing-door, they left Sherrington and Scott and Miss Archibald standing together in the center of the stage.

"I say," began the actor, "that Mrs. Brookfield is a corker, is n't she? One of the four hundred—well, if they're all like that, I'd like to get elected, that's all."

"She's a thoroughbred, that's what she is!" said the stage-manager. "And I'll make an actress out of her before I get through with her; see if I don't. She's got the artistic temperament. Her psychic force is n't under the control of her mentality, but I'll fix that all right."

"She may have the artistic temperament, as you say," was Miss Archibald's contribution to the conversation, "but she does not know the a-b-c of the business."

"That's so," Sherrington admitted. "She's green enough. But what of it? She's got it in her, has n't she? Well, I guess I can bring it out before I get through with her. I've tackled tougher jobs than that, and I'm ready to back myself this time."

"She's a good looker, anyway," said Scott. "Funny outfit, these amateurs, I don't think."

"Funny?" Miss Archibald returned. "They may be to you, but I do not care for that style of humor!"

CHAPTER VI

"Are you all ready?" asked Sherrington, giving a last glance around the stage. "You may ring up," he said to the prompter, as he walked toward the side where Evert was standing with Carla and Gurney Twiss, ready to go on.

With chill apprehension Evert heard the bell ring and saw the curtain begin slowly to rise. It was too late now to back out, and Carla would have to go through with the thing as best she could. But suppose she should have a sudden attack of stage-fright, and lose her voice, or forget her part, or break down altogether? And Evert clutched his wife's hand to encourage her.

She gave him an answering pressure. "Why, Evert," she said, "you are trembling!"

"Am I?" he asked. "You must n't, anyhow."

"It's in the middle of the first act that I get frozen stiff and my voice goes and I don't know what I 'm doing," Gurney Twiss declared. "Why, when I played *Charles Surface*, I—"

But Sherrington had reached them. "Don't be scared, Mrs. Brookfield," he said encouragingly. "You will be all right. Take it easy until you pick yourself up again. Don't be in a hurry; and let your voice out."

"I 'm not a bit frightened," she answered; "I don't see why either of you should think so. I 'm certain it 's going to be a big success!"

Evert felt her warm hand as it lay in his cold palm, and he could not detect a tremor. He glanced at her, and she seemed perfectly self-possessed. He thought he had never seen her looking better, and he remarked how becoming her riding-habit was, with the severe hat contrasting with the lively countenance beneath it.

"That 's right, that 's right," Sherrington returned. "But remember to speak very distinctly and make 'em hear you."

The few opening lines of the play had been

spoken by *Pauline* the maid, and the time came for *Froufrou* to enter.

"There's your cue," said Sherrington. "Now go, and let 'em have it."

She rushed on the stage, looked about for the newspaper she was supposed to be seeking, found it on a table at last, crossed to a sofa, and dropped down, fanning herself with the folded paper.

The broken sentence or two she had to speak could not be heard in the sudden outbreak of applause, which died away only to rise again and again, until *Froufrou* had to rise and bow, in spite of the fact that *Valréas*, in the person of Gurney Twiss, had rushed upon the stage after her and was standing awkwardly behind her sofa, somewhat disconcerted by the prolonged welcome with which Mrs. Brookfield was greeted.

For two or three Sundays the great amateur performance of *Froufrou* had been the chief topic in the society columns of the newspapers, and it had been repeatedly announced as "the Society event of the Season." Mrs. Suydam,

after careful consideration, had drawn up a list of patronesses containing the names of all the acknowledged leaders of New York society, and of a few of the richest and most eligible of the social aspirants, known as "climbers." The tickets had all been disposed of more than ten days before, and some of the best seats had been resold at a premium. One belated philanthropist had been forced to advertise his willingness to pay twice the original price for a subscriber's box.

Evert heard the applause with surprise; he had not expected more than a perfunctory clapping of hands; it gave him a throb of excitement, and he wanted it to go on yet longer. He knew it would gratify Carla, who was perfectly frank in her desire to be well received. He wondered which of his many friends scattered all over the house was most enthusiastic. He knew that his father had a seat in Mrs. Suydam's box, where D'Armagnac and De Ruyter also were. He had heard of Mrs. Carkendale's delight at the promised presence in her box of Mrs. Winston-Smith and the Bartlett girls.

He wished he could look out and see if the assembly was really as brilliant as the opening night of the opera; and he remembered that Mrs. Jimmy had passed the word around that it was to be an occasion when a woman could wear all her diamonds.

At last, after *Froufrou* had been forced to bow again and again, *Valréas* was able to begin, and the action of the play went on. It was only a short scene that *Froufrou* had at first, and then she left the story to be taken up by the others.

Evert was waiting for her as she came off radiant.

"I did get a splendid reception, did n't I?" she asked, as they went swiftly toward the dressing-room, the one usually occupied by the prima donna of the opera. "I'm sure it is going to be a great success."

"Then you are enjoying it?" Evert inquired, as they came to the door of the room, where his wife had hastily to change her costume from a riding-habit to a dinner dress.

"Enjoying it?" she repeated. "I never had such a good time before in my whole life. I'm

perfectly happy! I feel as if I'd like to go on acting for ever and ever!"

Evert said nothing, but he smiled in sympathy with her enjoyment.

"You wait for me here," she said. "I've got to get out of this habit and into a dinner gown, and it's going to be a terrible rush. And I want you here when I come out, to tell me if I'm presentable."

She had brought her own maid with her, and Evert knew that he would only be in her way while she made the quick change which would enable her to reappear toward the end of the act.

He turned away from the door, and was greeted by Gordon Scott, all ready for his own entrance as *Sartorys*.

Evert had an instinctive dislike for the man, which he felt to be groundless, and therefore to be conquered, so he shook hands with a cordiality he did not feel.

"Mrs. Brookfield got a splendid reception," the actor began, "but the house seems to me rather cold so far. Fashionable people are very

hard to thaw out. But they 'll wake up sooner or later. That scene of the two sisters in the third act, that will fetch them if nothing else does. That 's Mrs. Brookfield's best scene, I think; and Archibald 's very good in it, too."

"I do not know whether that is her best scene really," Evert responded. "Don't you think the death-scene, now—"

"You can't get me to say I like that last act," said Scott, with a self-satisfied laugh. "*Sartorys* is no good in the last act."

"But he behaves nobly," Evert returned, "and—"

"I don't mean the man," the actor broke in, as the other hesitated. "The man 's all right enough, I suppose. It 's the part that 's all wrong. In the last act *Sartorys* is only a feeder; *Froufrou* has all the fat; and even *Louise* can get that scene away from him."

"It had seemed to me that *Sartorys* was a very fine part," Evert declared, a little amazed at this technical view.

"It is n't so bad," the actor admitted; "but it might be better without being any too good.

Why, I've only one little scene in the fourth act, and I might just as well not be on in the fifth, for all the good it does me. *Froufrou* is a star-play really, and there is n't much in it for anybody else."

Evert noticed that Scott was paying attention to what was being done on the stage even while he was conversing. After they had exchanged a few more sentences the actor broke off suddenly.

"It's my turn in a minute," he said, adjusting his coat and picking up his hat again. "I wonder whether I shall get a hand."

In a minute his cue came, and he went on the stage. Evert listened, and he heard a fair amount of applause—nothing to compare with that which had greeted Carla, but enough, so her husband thought, to satisfy any mere man.

A moment after Scott had made his entrance, Gurney Twiss made his exit.

"Don't stop me," he cried. "I can't stay and chatter with you. I've got to make a lightning change."

Then as he sped past Evert, he called back

over his shoulder: "It 's going beautifully, is n't it? Before we get through, we 'll show those professionals that they are not the only people who can act!"

Left alone, Evert walked to and fro in the ample space between the walls and the scenery that boxed in the comparatively small part of the huge stage which was to be used in the performance of the unspectacular play. He smiled as he contrasted the professional calmness of Scott with the feverish anxiety of Twiss; and he almost laughed aloud as he recalled how unconsciously each had revealed his own egotism. He asked himself whether there was anything in the actor's calling which forced a man to be thinking always of himself, and he wondered whether Carla might be infected by this.

He had not time to analyze this novel suggestion when she came toward him. The simple dinner dress of a delicate blue was as becoming to her, so he thought, as the riding-habit had been. It was not cut low, since *Gilberte* in the first act is only a girl; but it was open at the throat, and it revealed her graceful

neck and her well-rounded arms. As she came swimming toward him, he thought her lovelier than ever, and he would have liked to clasp her to him, and to carry her off where nobody else could gaze at her.

"I was n't long, was I?" she asked, as the maid stooped and shook out the folds of the gown. She held a gauzy shawl in her hand.

"Won't you put that shawl on until it is your turn?" he urged. "It is n't any too warm here."

"What an old fidget you are!" she retorted, smiling up at him. "But I 'm very good, and I 'll do anything to please you."

So she let him drape the shawl about her.

"That bracelet is loose," he said. "Can't I—"

"No, you can't, you old stupid!" she declared. "Don't you know I have to get *Louise* to fasten that for me on the stage?"

"I can't remember everything you have to do," he said penitently.

"Of course not," she returned gaily. "But I must remember for you. How is it going now?"

"The play?" he answered. "It's all right, I suppose; I don't know. I have n't looked at the stage since you went to dress."

"That's a pity, for this is *Louise's* best scene, and Archibald is really very good in it," she replied, leading him to a corner where they could see what was being acted. "Mr. Scott rehearsed this very well, too; he's played it often with Modjeska. He looks the part, too—just like a man who would kill *Valréas* when the time comes. But I don't think he is so very handsome, do you?"

Evert desired not to be unfair to the man, and so he answered: "Well, he is n't bad-looking."

Carla glanced up again and laughed. "You are not very enthusiastic about it. I don't believe you will ever buy one of his photographs to put under your pillow and dream about, as so many girls do."

Then she examined her husband carefully as he stood beside her. He was a little uncomfortable under the scrutiny. "There is n't anything wrong with me, is there?" he asked.

"Wrong?" she echoed merrily. "No, indeed! Do you know what I was thinking then?" She raised her hand and took hold of his beard, twisting the point of it with the caressing gesture that always gave him exquisite pleasure. "I saw how well that dress-suit fitted you and how strong and tall you look to-night, and I was just thinking that my husband is the handsomest man I know!"

Before Evert could make any reply to this, she slipped the shawl from her shoulders, and threw it to him, and flitted away, crying: "There 's my cue in a minute."

Evert stood still with the shawl in his hand, and he watched *Froufrou* trip out on the stage and beg *Louise* to fasten her bracelet for her. In fact, he did not stir from his post till the end of the act. He did not take his eyes from his wife, marveling always at her ease and at the calmness with which she performed her part, never forgetting a word and never omitting any of the bits of "business" that Sherrington had suggested during the rehearsals. He had seen too much good acting while he was studying at

the Beaux Arts not to be aware that his wife was not an accomplished artist. She was unequal and uncertain, and often obviously amateurish; but the charm of the woman herself was thrown over all the deficiencies of the actress, and the result was delightful. She could not help being graceful and coquettish and fascinating, and her overpowering personality made all her defects as if they did not exist. In Evert's eyes even the occasional false notes in Carla's performance of *Froufrou*, the misplaced emphasis here and the inadequate gesture there, were not so much artistic blemishes as captivating revelations of her own personality. He could easily conceive a more consummate art; but he would not have had her modify a movement or an intonation. It was not that what she did was perfect in his eyes; it was only that he loved her just as she was and could not wish her different.

When the curtain fell on the first act there was abundant applause, and it had to rise again that the performers might be seen once more. But



"EVERT STOOD STILL WITH THE SHAWL IN HIS HAND"

1000
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Evert felt that there was no deep enthusiasm as yet in the audience, and that success was still to be conquered.

And in the second act the victory was not won, for that was the act in which Carla was seen to least advantage. With *Valréas*, *Frou-frou* has to rehearse a scene in a play, and the authors have ingeniously brought out the stiffness and artificiality of private theatricals; but this was quite beyond Carla's powers. It called for a degree of histrionic skill that she had not attained, and it demanded also a certain sense of humor. Now, Evert had already discovered that his wife, gay as she was, and bright and quick-witted, was somewhat lacking in humor. As he watched this scene, he detected a consciousness on her part that she was not doing it well. Certainly she was far less spontaneous and easy in the second act than she had been in the first. When the act was over at last, Evert thought that the applause was perfunctory only, and that it was almost a mockery for the curtain to be raised again in response to a request so half-hearted.

He escorted her to her dressing-room in silence.

"That was awful, was n't it?" she asked, with a tear in the corner of her eye. "I don't see how I ever got through the act. I felt as if I wanted to die right there on the stage. I always did hate that scene; I could n't help being hard and stiff and poky in it. I don't see why Sherrington did n't cut it out. I told him I knew I could n't play it. He said it was necessary for the story, and I asked him if it was necessary for the story that I should have to make such a fool of myself. And I knew I should, too—I was just certain of it. And I did try so hard; you know I did, Evert. I went over it, and I went over it, and it was all no use. I must have looked like a fright, too, for I'd no sooner got on than I felt that I was n't becomingly dressed. I don't know what was wrong, but it was something, I'm sure. Oh, I wish I'd never let Mrs. Jimmy persuade me to act! If she wanted *Froufrou* for her working-girls, why did she not play *Froufrou* herself? I just wish I was sitting up there quietly in a box tak-

ing it easy, and not caring at all whether it is going well or not. I don't believe she does care now; the tickets are all sold, and she's got the money for her working-girls. Working-girls, indeed—I wonder if any of them has ever worked as hard as I have worked this last week. I don't believe it! And as for Mrs. Jimmy, I know she never does anything at all. I think it is just hateful of her to have made me do this!"

Evert let her run on for a little while, believing that she could thus best relieve the tension of her nerves. At last he suggested that she was quite wrong in thinking that her dress was not becoming.

"And I took so much trouble about all my dresses, too," she declared sorrowfully, "and they cost you an awful lot of money, Evert. I do think it is hard that they make me look such a fright. But the one I wear in the next act is the best of them, I'm sure, and that's lucky, too, because that's my best scene, the scene with Archibald. Sherrington says that if she plays up to me all right, that scene ought to fetch them, if nothing else does."

Evert reassured her as best he could; and then she turned him out of the dressing-room, declaring that she could not have him there talking to her when she had not a minute to lose.

He waited near the door until she was dressed again. He complimented her on the effect of that costume; and he was pleased to see that her spirits had returned, as though she had laid aside her despondency with the dress which had helped to cause it. She was still excited; her eyes glowed, and her own color was high under the rouge of the stage.

"If I don't fetch them in this act," she said to her husband, as they walked to the center of the stage, "then I'm no good at all. I'd better give up and never try to act again. But I don't believe I'm going to fail. This is the hardest act of all, Sherrington says, and he thinks it is the one I do best."

Before Evert could answer, the stage-manager came toward them. He gave a final glance at the scenery and furniture, crossed to the piano and opened it, and then said, "If you are ready, Mrs. Brookfield?"

"I'm ready," she cried, "I'm ready." Then she turned to her husband. "Run along, Evert, and stand in the prompt-entrance there where I can see you and where you can see me. And I shall want you to tell me exactly what you think!"

Evert did as he was bid; and in a minute the curtain rose on the third act, which, for *Froufrou* herself, is the most exacting in the play, since she never leaves the stage, and since the emotions she has to express must be kept in hand carefully, so that they slowly swell in intensity until they break forth almost unrestrained in the final scene between the two sisters.

Gurney Twiss joined Evert just as the act began, much to the young architect's dissatisfaction, for he wanted to give his whole attention to the performance.

"I'm glad you are here, Brookfield," the amateur began. "I want you to see my scene here and tell me what you think of my conception of the part. You've been in Paris so long, you must be a good judge of acting, and I'd like to have your honest opinion. I don't want to

boast, you know—of course not; but I confess I do fancy myself a little in *Valréas*. And I've got some new business in this act—you just watch and see what I do with my hat and my cane. Sherrington says he never saw anything more original; and it's all my own, too."

"That's very interesting," responded Evert, with his eyes fastened on his wife's face, and scarcely hearing a word that Twiss was saying.

"Is n't it?" the other went on. "Although I say it myself, I don't believe many professionals think out as much new business as I do. Why, when I played *Charles Surface*, I arranged the picture-gallery scene in a way nobody had ever seen it before, and everybody said it was a first-rate idea. Everybody, that is, except the man who was doing the theatrical notices on the *Daily Dial*, and he tried to be funny. I do hate to see a man try to be funny, don't you? And he was n't at all fair, either. I could n't make out what his motive was for a long while, and then I found out he was a friend of Dick de Ruyter's, and then it was all as plain as day, of course."

"Of course," echoed Evert, feeling that he was expected to say something.

"Yes; Dick de Ruyter wanted to play *Charles Surface* himself, and they gave it to me," Twiss explained. "So he was mad, and he got this newspaper man to make fun of me. Mean, was n't it? I don't care how mad I might be, I'd never do a thing like that."

Evert made no reply to this, and the amateur chattered away a little longer, and then went off to be ready for his own scene with *Froufrou*.

The act was played swiftly. *Froufrou* has a scene with her friend the *Baroness*, a scene with her husband, *Sartorys*, a scene with the man who loves her, *Valréas*; and then she is a silent spectator of the scene in which her husband seeks to get her sister *Louise* to accept a proposal of marriage. At last comes the culmination of the action, when *Froufrou* turns on *Louise* and reproaches her, and taunts and insults her, and accuses her of having taken away both husband and child, and ends by bidding her keep what she has taken.

Evert followed this scene with a febrile excite-

ment akin to *Froufrou's* own. He could not disentangle *Froufrou* and Carla. He was moved by *Froufrou's* emotion, and he felt that part of his feeling was due to the fact that it was his own wife who was playing the part.

And he recognized that she played it well, not without faults, of course, but with real force, with a rising sweep of passion that he had not supposed her to be capable of, with the suggestion of a depth of sentiment he had never suspected in her. It was a revelation to him; and while he was carried away, he did not quite like it. So long as Carla was merely playing at acting, there was little danger that she might be seized with a love for it; but now she was really acting, throwing herself into a part and carrying the immense audience with her.

When the act was over, the applause rang out full and strong and sustained. The curtain had to be raised again and again; and finally Sherrington sent the performers out across the stage in front of the curtain, in pairs, with *Sartorys* and *Froufrou* last. It was *Froufrou* that the immense audience wished to acclaim; and

as she stood there bowing, only a few feet from Evert, while women were clapping and men were stamping, his heart sank within him, for he could not fail to see the triumphant happiness by which she was possessed.

"Carla!" was all he could say, as she joined him.

"It astonished you too?" she said, with her bubbling laughter. "It astonished me. I did n't know I could act like that. I don't know what came over me all at once. I was n't afraid at all. I felt that I had to do it, and that I had better be as bold as I could. So I just let myself go. And you thought it was n't so bad?"

"Carla!" he repeated, still under the sway of the unexpected exhibition.

"Well, if it hit you that way, I guess I could n't have been as bad as I was in the second act."

They came to the door of her dressing-room again, she leaning on his arm; and then she turned him away once more.

He was restless. He would have liked to

walk, and he tried to pace up and down at the back of the stage; but he kept getting in the way of the stage-hands as they made ready for the fourth act. His head was in a whirl; and he was oppressed by a sense of an impending crisis, as though something strange was going to happen to him immediately.

He longed to have the thing over now as soon as possible, and he was glad when the fourth act began. He took the same position he had had during the preceding act. But his feelings were no longer the same.

He had discovered the absurdity of his own position. He saw that he was fast sinking to the situation of an actress's husband, a useless person except to run errands and dangle attendance on her. All he needed to make it complete was to have the care of her poodle-dog. Evert resented this state of affairs, and he realized with intense dissatisfaction the unreality of the life he and Carla had been living for the past few weeks. Why should his wife be out there on the stage pretending to be somebody else, married to somebody else, eloping with somebody else?

Why should he be standing there looking on without protest? Why should his father be seated in a box watching her?

He turned again to the stage, and there was Gordon Scott. It was the scene in which the injured husband tells the guilty wife that he means to kill her lover. Evert saw the way in which Scott was looking at Carla, and he wanted to spring out on the stage and knock the fellow down. He wanted to snatch her away from all such associations, not from any jealousy, but from sheer physical disgust. That his wife, that the woman he loved, should be making believe in the sight of a thousand strangers to love another man was not only undignified, it was repugnant to every fiber of his being.

The performance dragged slowly on, and Evert asked himself impatiently if it was never going to end.

He could not keep quiet, and he turned abruptly away, almost running into Sherrington, who was approaching in company with a flashily dressed elderly man, with a shrewd, boastful, vulgar face.

As he hurried away he heard the stage-manager say, "That 's her husband," and he shrank from the remark as though it had been a blow.

He checked his pace as the elderly man spoke. "Do you suppose he would object? She 'd be the biggest go on the road; I 'll stake my reputation on that. I 'd give her five hundred a week and a percentage, and I 'd make big money, too. It ain't easy to get a good play, one that would be a vehicle for her; but of course we might try the legitimate—only the *Lady of Lyons* is pretty well played out now, and there is n't much draft left in *Galatea*. Say, she 'd be fine in *Galatea*, would n't she?"

Evert had stopped to listen to this, with no consciousness of his eavesdropping. Now he waked up and went on.

Miss Margaret Archibald was standing near him, watching the performance through an open door, as *Louise* does not appear in the fourth act. Evert had spoken to her half a dozen times at the rehearsals he had attended. He had not thought about her since, but he had

formed the impression that she was a woman of much dignity of character.

He approached her now. "Miss Archibald," he began, "can you tell me who that man is—the man talking to Mr. Sherrington?"

She walked back with him until the two men, who had been concealed by the scenery, were in view again.

"That 's Zeke Kilburn," she answered. "I wonder what he has come for?"

"Zeke Kilburn?" Evert repeated. "I 've heard the name, I'm sure, but I don't place him."

"He is the manager of the Cosmopolitan Theater," the actress explained. "I suppose Sherrington must have told him about this performance, and—"

"He 's a manager?" Evert went on, pursuing his own thoughts. "Then— Oh, it's perfectly absurd! The whole thing is ridiculous." And he laughed irritably.

Miss Archibald looked up at him in amazement.

"I beg your pardon," he said, suddenly aware of his rudeness. "I was n't thinking of

you at all. I had just heard something, and—I trust you will forgive me?"

"Oh, certainly," she said, but she turned away a little indifferently.

A minute later, and the fourth act was over.

Carla came straight toward him, with a slight dissatisfaction visible on her face.

"I never did like that act," she declared. "*Froufrou* really has n't anything to do. But I'll fetch them again in the fifth act—see if I don't. The fifth act is almost as good for me as the third; and did n't we catch them with that third act?"

Evert was glad that she was so taken with her own thoughts that she could not scrutinize his expression.

At the door of the dressing-room Sherrington came toward them, separating from a young man with whom he had been in earnest conversation.

"Mrs. Brookfield," the stage-manager began, "there's a reporter here from the *Gazette*, and he wants to know if he can't have the favor of a few words with you."

"A reporter to see me?" said Carla, delighted,

and she looked over at the young man with a winning smile. "How lovely! But I can't see him now. I've got to dress for the fifth act. Besides, I should be frightened to death to be interviewed. You see him, Evert."

"I?" cried her husband. "He does not want to see me."

"You see him for me!" she urged; "and you must be ever so nice to him, too—just as nice as you know how." With that she smiled again at the young man, who had been drawing nearer to them, and then she disappeared in her dressing-room.

Sherrington told the reporter that Mrs. Brookfield had to dress for the last act, but that there was Mr. Brookfield.

The young man was disappointed, but he made the best of it. He asked Evert whether Mrs. Brookfield had ever been on the stage. Evert told him that of course she had not.

"I did n't know," the reporter answered. "She played that third act so superbly that I thought she might have been a professional. Has she any intention of going on the stage?"

"None whatever!" was Evert's curt reply.

"Don't you think that there 'll be a loud call for her to act again?" was the next question.

"What of it?" her husband replied. "Mrs. Brookfield's private affairs are no business of the public."

"But if New York has had a chance to applaud this sudden revelation of her genius for the stage, it is n't quite fair, is it, that Chicago and Boston and San Francisco should be deprived of the same privilege?" the reporter urged.

"I have told you once for all," said Evert, sharply, "that this is Mrs. Brookfield's first and last appearance on the stage."

The young man was about to insist on a prolongation of the conversation, when Evert caught sight of Mrs. Suydam coming toward them.

"Excuse me," he added abruptly, "but I cannot discuss the matter further. I refuse absolutely to be interviewed."

Then he went toward the lady who was responsible for the situation in which he found himself.

"I've come to congratulate you!" said Mrs. Jimmy. "You must be in the seventh heaven! Mrs. Brookfield is admirable—simply admirable!"

Evert smiled coldly. "Yes," he said at last; "I thought that she did play that scene with the sister very effectively."

"Effectively?" repeated Mrs. Jimmy. "Is that all you can say for it? If I had acted as well as that, and my husband praised me in that cold-blooded fashion, I should want to get a divorce."

"Ah, but you did not act at all," Evert was able to retort.

"And it is lucky I did not, is n't it?" she answered. "I suppose I can go in and see Carla? I've got something to say to her—besides congratulating her, of course."

She knocked at the door, and the maid admitted her.

Evert wanted air; he wanted a long walk; he wished he was on horseback on the sea-shore, with the ocean breeze blowing full on him and sweeping away all sickly odors of the theater.

He remembered one gallop he had had with Carla out toward Point Judith, only a fortnight after he had first met her; and he longed to go back and live it over again.

In a few minutes Mrs. Suydam and Mrs. Brookfield came out of the dressing-room together. The president of the Working-girls' Rest and Recreation League went back to her box, escorted by Gurney Twiss, who was supposed to have been killed in the fourth act. Carla took her position near the door by which she was to enter; and the fifth act began.

Evert stood by his wife's side until she made her entrance. And he remained in the same place throughout the act. His hatred of this play-acting grew the more he brooded over it, and his impatience to have the thing done and ended forever.

It was with a long-drawn sigh of relief that he saw the curtain slowly fall on the final act. The great amateur performance of *Froufrou* was over at last, and Evert Brookfield felt that it would be his fault if his wife was ever again to be mixed up in anything of the sort.

CHAPTER VII

When *Froufrou*, having died pathetically at the end of the play, had bowed again and again and again in response to tumultuous applause that forced the curtain up three times, and when Carla, having received congratulations and compliments and expressions of gratitude from the Executive Committee of the Board of Lady Managers of the Working-girls' Rest and Recreation League, was at last able to retire to her dressing-room, Evert was impatient to get her away. He persuaded her to leave her maid to pack up her dresses and belongings. He would not even give her time to change the elaborate dressing-gown in which *Froufrou* had departed this life. He hurried her to the stage-door, where their brougham was waiting.

In spite of her protests, she did not really object to this high-handed proceeding—at

least, so Evert divined, having discovered already that, while she always pretended to resist, she really relished his exhibitions of overmastering strength.

"I don't see why you should hurry me so, Evert," she cried, as she stepped into the carriage. "The theater is n't on fire, is it?"

Her husband looked up at the coachman, and said, "Home!"

Then he sprang into the seat beside her and snapped the door.

"It's all over!" he said, with a sigh of relief as the horses started forward.

"Yes, it's all over!" she repeated sorrowfully. "And I was afraid I'd never get through it. But it was splendid while it lasted, was n't it?"

Evert had so completely lost sympathy with the performance that he was genuinely surprised at the note of enthusiasm in her voice.

"Did you really like it?" he asked doubtfully.

"Like it?" she cried disdainfully. "I loved it. I felt as if I could go on acting that last



“HER HUSBAND SAID ‘HOME’”



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scene of *Froufrou* forever and forever. I did n't want it ever to stop. I 'd have been glad to play the fifth act over again, and then the fourth, and then the third! I enjoyed every minute of it."

"Even when you were frightened?" he suggested.

"Most of all when I was frightened," she replied—"because, you see, I was n't really scared. Why should I have been scared really? I was n't afraid of failing; and I did n't do it so very badly, now, did I?"

"Badly?" he returned. "Of course not. You were too good altogether!"

She laughed happily. "You say that as if you did n't want me to act well."

"I don't," he responded frankly. "I don't want you to act at all! I 'm sick of it all. I 'm overjoyed that it 's done with, once for all."

She said nothing for a moment, and then she nestled close to him.

"You need n't be so cross about it," she declared, "just as if you did n't love me any more."

"I don't think I ever loved you as much as I do at this minute," he retorted.

"You don't pet me as you used to," she answered. "You don't put your arm around me, and—"

Evert drew her to him, and she laid her head in the hollow of his shoulder.

"That 's better," she said. "I don't want you ever to give up the habit of petting me."

Evert looked down on her head, and his heart was filled with happiness as he answered, "Is it likely?"

"Oh, I don't know what 's likely with you men," she returned gaily. "You are all so queer. That Mr. Scott is n't quite a gentleman, is he? But he did play the part well, I must say."

Evert admitted that the man had not acted badly. "But why talk about the thing any more?"

"Oh, but I must!" she cried. "I did have a good time! Excitement—and success! That's what makes life worth living, is n't it? Do you know how I felt during that third act?—that's

the one where I quarrel with Archibald. I don't see how it was exactly, but I felt as I did once back on the farm in Kentucky. I was only fifteen then, and I wore my hair down on my shoulders; and one day I was disobedient, and I got on one of the horses without any saddle. I used to ride them astride like a man; there was n't anybody to see me, except the stable-boys, and of course they did n't count. Generally I could manage any horse on the farm, but this one got away from me; and there we were, flying down the pike, and I could n't hold him, and my hair got all loose, and I did n't know whether he was running away and whether he 'd ever stop. That was splendid, too! Excitement and success,—just like to-night,—for I conquered him after a while; and I rode him home on the snaffle."

"I suppose we all enjoy success," Evert remarked, "but I don't believe mere excitement is good for any of us."

"I don't know if it's good for me," laughed Carla, "but I'm going to take it when it comes my way."

Evert thought that he could still detect in her voice the ground-swell of the storm of excitement through which she had passed that evening. His detestation of the performance was stiffening steadily; but he was almost ashamed of it when he observed how much Carla had enjoyed her triumph.

The carriage drove on in silence for a minute or two. Then Carla took her husband's hand between both of her own, and he thrilled at the warm touch.

"Evert," she began gently, "you must n't suppose because I like the fun of all this acting that I don't think of you just as much as ever—because I do. I should n't have liked it at all if you had n't been there to share it with me. I don't ever want to have any pleasures you can't join in."

He tightened the pressure of his arm about her waist, but he said nothing in response.

She spread out the palm of his hand on one of hers, and smoothed it down and played with it. Her own was warm always; it was firm and vigorous; perhaps it was even broader than was

quite in proportion, but Evert would not have liked it any smaller.

"You did enjoy it to-night, did n't you?" she asked at last.

"I was pleased to see that you enjoyed it," was his evasive answer.

"Then you did n't really like it?" she pursued.

"I did n't like to see you out on the stage there with all those people staring at you," he explained, after a little hesitation.

"They were all admiring me, I'm sure," she responded. "I don't see what you have to complain of there. Everybody was just as nice to me as they could be."

"They were all looking at you!" he retorted.

"Why not?" she returned. "I've often heard you say you liked to look at me. Well, why should n't they like it, too? I don't see."

"You belong to me!" he asserted. "They have n't anything to do with you. I did n't want them to admire you. I wish they would all mind their own business and let my wife alone."

"That 's simply selfish," she replied, with

another of her little laughs. "And you would have to admire me ever so much more than you do, if you want me to go without admiration from anybody else. You see, I like admiration—I like all I can get of it."

"You have never gone without it—even before you took this part," her husband responded.

"And I 'm sure men are just as vain as women, and they like admiration just as much, if not more," she declared. "You can't make me believe you did n't notice the way Archibald looked at you!"

It annoyed him to have her fall into the common theatrical trick of calling an actress by her last name only.

"Miss Archibald?" he returned.

"Miss Archibald, if you prefer," she answered; "Miss Margaret Archibald. She could n't keep her eyes off you. I suppose she had n't ever seen a handsome man before."

"Oh, come now, Carla," said Evert, smiling at her mock-serious tone.

"Oh, I saw it all," she went on. "I kept my

eye on you too. And yet they say she's going to marry Scott."

"He did look at you in a way I did not like at all," Evert retorted.

"Oh, you saw that too, did you?" she answered.

"I could n't help seeing it," he replied.

"And yet you did not notice how Archibald followed you round with her eyes?" Carla went on. "That's funny, is n't it? I don't think she has such bad taste, either, do you, you handsome old thing? She knows you are good-looking just as well as I do!"

"Is it true that Miss Archibald is going to marry Mr. Scott?" asked Evert, to avoid this personal banter, always distasteful to him.

"Gurney Twiss says so," she answered. "That does n't prove it, of course; but I should n't wonder if it was true, after all. Then they will always act together, and be lovers in every play, or husband and wife. I think that must be lovely—to be on the stage and to have one's own husband make love to you."

Evert made no response to this, and she clung to him a little closer.

"I do wish you would only act, too!" she continued, after a moment's silence, raising her face and looking at him with her liquid eyes. "Then I should be perfectly happy! I should n't have a single tiny thing left to wish for."

• He bent forward and kissed her. "I can play the lover in private life," he said, "but not on the stage."

"Don't you think you could ever learn to act?" she asked eagerly.

"No, I don't think so," he answered, with a hard laugh at the absurd suggestion; "and I know I don't mean to try."

"Sherrington could teach you," she urged. "He's taught lots of people who did n't make such bad actors after all."

"I don't want to be made into not such a bad actor after all," he declared. "There are few things I would n't do for you, Carla, very few, but acting is one of them. It is enough to have one of us who has had an ambition of that sort; and even if I was really anxious to act, I

should never have the success you have made to-night."

"Do you actually think so?" was her reply. "Don't you think you could ever get so that you could support me? I'm sure you would find acting ever so much more fun than your poky old architecture."

Evert said nothing. Whenever his wife hinted that her fondness for the stage was growing, his heart sank within him. He hoped that her liking even for mild private theatricals would be transitory, and he expected that it might wear itself out with this performance of *Froufrou*. He had not counted on the genuine success of her acting, on the real fire she had thrown into the quarrel with *Louise*, on the playful pathos of her death-scene. He recognized now that she had far more of the histrionic gift than he had supposed; and he regretted the discovery, knowing how hard it is for us to give up that which nature allows us to do well.

Carla broke the silence. "Did you see Kilburn, the manager?" she inquired.

"Kilburn?" repeated her husband. "Yes, I

think I did—if he was the vulgar little man who was talking to Sherrington.”

“That must have been Kilburn,” she returned. “He was in front watching my performance, and he was simply delighted with it. He came behind to tell Sherrington so—to say he had n’t seen anything like it since Adelaide Neilson! Think of his saying that about me!”

“It’s very kind of him, indeed,” was Evert’s curt acknowledgment of this compliment to his wife. “But I don’t know that his opinion matters one way or the other.”

“But it does matter a great deal,” she went on. “He’s a very good judge of acting, so Sherrington says, and he told Sherrington—oh, but I had better not tell you this.”

“Why not?” asked Evert.

“Because,” she answered—“well, because I don’t believe you will like it!”

“I can stand it,” said Evert, scornfully. “I don’t believe that anything Mr. Kilburn may have said to Mr. Sherrington need worry me.”

“That is n’t a nice way to take it at all, Evert,” she answered playfully, “and I’ve a

great mind not to tell you, just to punish you. He said that he 'd sign an engagement to star me!"

"That was a piece of insufferable impudence, I must say!" cried Evert, indignantly.

"Do you think so?" she answered, a little crestfallen. "Why, I thought it was ever so complimentary! And it is, too—if you only take it right. And he said that it would be very easy to work a big boom for me all over the United States—from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, was the way he put it."

"I do wish the fellow would mind his own business!" said Evert, impatiently. "What have you to do with Portland, Maine, or Portland, Oregon? You live here in New York—here with me!"

"Yes, of course," she answered. "Of course; I know that. But it is nice to feel that one is appreciated, is n't it, and that if one only wanted one could make ever so much money?"

Evert made no reply to this question. He looked out of the window and saw that they were within a block of their own door.

"Carla!" he said suddenly. "Promise me one thing!"

"Certainly," she answered, "if it 's reasonable. What is it?"

"Promise you will never act in another play without asking me first," he said gravely.

"Do you really mean it?" she asked, drawing away from him a little.

"Indeed I do," he declared forcibly.

"You want me to promise never to act in another play without asking you first?" she repeated.

"You will promise me that, won't you, Carla, dear?" he urged.

"Yes," she said at last. "I 'll promise that, if you want me to. But I shall expect you not to object if I do ever want to act again."

"We won't borrow trouble," Evert returned, satisfied with his victory; "we 'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Perhaps you will never want to act again."

He was glad when she apparently changed the subject of the conversation.

"Do you know why Mrs. Jimmy came behind to see me this evening?" she asked.

"How should I know?" was his answer. "I suppose she had the common politeness to come and congratulate you and thank you for the money her working-girls are going to get."

"She was very complimentary, I must say," Carla admitted; "but that was n't what she came for. She wanted something."

"She does n't want you to play another part for her, does she?" Evert inquired sarcastically. "Why does n't she act it herself? Why does n't she get her husband to act with her? That would be an attraction, I must say. But I suppose Jimmy would rather get up a circus or something horsy."

"No," said Carla, slowly; "she did n't want me to play another part."

"That 's good," declared Evert; "and I 'm grateful to her for this consideration, although she can't know how glad I am that all this nonsense is over at last!"

"What Mrs. Jimmy does want," explained Carla, "is to have us all go to Washington early

next month and do *Froufrou* once more, just as we did to-night. Of course it is n't settled yet that we are to go; but Mrs. Jimmy has been asked to arrange it if she can."

"But you promised me you would n't act in another play," Evert protested, "and—"

"But this is n't another play," Carla interrupted; "this is the same play—the same poor little *Froufrou*."

"And I was so glad the thing was over and ended!" said Evert.

"Besides," pleaded Carla, "I 'm not breaking my promise. I 'm asking you before I accept; I 'm asking you, and I do hope you won't be so cruel as to refuse."

"It's perfectly absurd of Mrs. Jimmy!" Evert insisted. "She is insatiable! I think she might be satisfied with what she has accomplished already. If she wants to have *Froufrou* performed in Washington, why can't she get somebody else to play the part? You have done your share here, and more too! Why can't Miss Archibald play it?"

"Now, Evert," said his wife, "it's you who

are perfectly absurd! Archibald as *Froufrou*—why, I never heard of such a thing! She could n't touch it. I've no doubt she would like to try well enough; she might go on for it, of course. But—oh, I don't believe they could sell any tickets at all if I did n't go! At any rate, that's what Mrs. Jimmy says."

"And where is this thing to end?" asked Evert. "There's Baltimore after Washington, I suppose, and then Boston and Chicago—and, well, why not San Francisco?"

"Oh, I assure you nobody has suggested anywhere but Washington," Carla explained. "I don't know that I'd care to go to Baltimore or Boston or anywhere else. But Washington is different, is n't it? It's the capital, and all that."

"I don't see the difference," Evert returned. "It's another performance, and it is n't New York—that's what I can see very plainly."

"But Washington is different, I'm sure," she went on. "There are all the foreign ambassadors there, you know; and foreigners are so much more appreciative than we are, and they

know so much more about acting. Then there 's the President."

"Now, what has the President got to do with it?" asked Evert, smiling in spite of himself.

"Oh, it would be fine to act *Froufrou* before the President of the United States!" she asserted enthusiastically.

"I don't suppose he knows as much about acting as those foreign ambassadors you are so interested in," declared Evert, almost laughing at her earnestness.

"Now, don't make fun of me, Evert," she cried; "it is n't fair! You ought to know what I mean. The President is—well, he 's the President, and that 's enough for me. I 'd dearly love to act *Froufrou* before the President of the United States—and the foreign ambassadors, too, since you insist on it."

"I do not insist," he said, as the brougham stopped before their own door.

He was about to get out, when she held him. "You have n't answered me," she said.

"About what?" he asked.

"You have n't said you were willing to have me play *Froufrou* in Washington—"

"Before the President?" he answered. "I'd rather you never acted again—"

"Oh, Evert!" she interrupted, and the reproach pierced him, slight as it was.

"But if you really want—" he began.

"I've just set my heart on it!" she pleaded, looking up at him affectionately.

"Oh, well," he answered at last, "if you insist on it!"

And he was rewarded at once by the swift appearance of the dimple he loved to see.

CHAPTER VIII

When Evert Brookfield was able to look back more calmly over the events which crowded the month following the performance of *Froufrou* at the Metropolitan Opera-House, he could not bear to dwell on them. His memory of that period of his married life was like a disordered dream; and even while he was living through it, he had felt almost as though he were the victim of a nightmare.

On the morning after the performance of *Froufrou* every New York newspaper gave it a prominent position on the front page; one journal even declared it to be the most important event of the season, worthy of commemoration as the happy wedding of society and the stage under the auspices of charity. Most of the papers further adorned their columns with portraits of the chief performers, of Mrs. Brook-

field and Gurney Twiss, of Miss Archibald and Gordon Scott, accompanying them with pictures of Mrs. Jimmy Suydam and others of the patronesses.

And on the following Sunday the newspapers simply spread themselves all over the affair. One of them printed a special article on the Working-girls' Rest and Recreation League, appending interviews with half a dozen working-girls, in which they were made to express great gratitude toward the society ladies who had taken so much trouble in behalf of the poor toilers, and in which one saleslady (whose portrait was also printed) was made to declare that this beautiful deed of benevolence was calculated to bring the classes and the masses together again. Another journal had an equally elaborate article on Mrs. Jimmy Suydam and on the other ladies on the executive committee of the league. But, to Evert's increasing dissatisfaction, he found that the most space was given to his wife, of whom five different portraits were published, bearing little resemblance to one another or to the original. One made her very tall, and another

rather short; one represented her as extremely thin, and another as obviously plump; while a fifth revealed her as the mother of twins, which she was carrying one in each arm. In the letter-press accompanying this last imaginative sketch there was an equally imaginative account of her career, in which the reader was told how strong her predilection for the playhouse had been even in childhood, how she had recited Shakspeare with ardor in her early girlhood, how she had studied tragedy in Paris under Coquelin, and how Sara Bernhardt, having heard the gifted young American recite once at the American ambassador's in Paris, had declared unhesitatingly that she had never supposed such genius was possible in one so young.

These articles Evert read with shivering disgust, and Carla with commingled amusement and pleasure, although the Coquelin-Bernhardt paragraph was too much even for her, and she asked: "What is the matter with them that they can't get anything right? And the idea of thinking that I had twins! I never heard of such a thing!"

This outbreak took place at the Sunday break-

fast-table, and Dr. Brookfield glanced up with a smile. "Perhaps the reporter who wrote that had looked on the wine when it was red, and he had seen baby double."

"He's a horrid man, anyway," she returned; "and when I read things like that I feel as if some vulgar creature had laid his paws on me. Ugh!" And she gave a little shudder of physical repulsion. "But I must say that most of the newspaper men have been very nice to me, indeed. Nobody could have been more complimentary than that man was in the *Dial*. I do wonder if the Washington papers will be friendly and sympathetic. I'm sure they would be if they only knew what an encouragement it is when one feels that one is appreciated."

The doctor looked at her with tolerant affection. "I don't think there is any real danger that you will not be appreciated, my dear," he suggested, with his quizzical expression.

She laughed merrily. "They always are pretty good to me, for a fact," she admitted. "I suppose that's because the reporters are men. I can always get along with men, some-

how; but I'm not sure women reporters would be quite so pleasant to me—women are queer, anyway, don't you think so?"

Dr. Brookfield admitted that he had met women who were queer.

Evert said nothing. He had given his consent to the Washington performance, and he regretted that he had done so, although he was well aware that even if he had refused, he could not long resist his wife's pleading. Her delight in her own success was so frank and so exuberant that he had not the heart even to wish to check it or curtail it.

But it was with real alarm that he noted how her liking for acting was growing, and how absorbed she was becoming in the theater. She took him to see all the plays in town, making up parties and going two or three times to the same piece if it attracted her. She had Gurney Twiss to dinner often; and with him she could indulge in technical talk about the drama, although, as Evert remarked to himself, this generally degenerated rapidly into personal gossip about theatrical folk.

Evert even began to suspect in his wife an increasing desire for excitement for its own sake. In the earlier months of her married life she had been not only contented, but happy; and her home had been the scene of her happiness. Now, so Evert feared, domestic felicity was no longer as satisfying as it had been before. Of course she loved her husband and her child as much as ever; it never occurred to Evert to doubt this for a moment; but he wondered if she did not find this family affection less sustaining and less adequate than it had been a few months earlier. She said nothing that he could misinterpret; but he was swift to seize on the intangible and to analyze the inner meaning of his deductions. It would be too much to say that he discovered many symptoms of feverish unrest, but he did—or he thought he did—detect a few now and then; and he was forever afraid that he might find more in the immediate future. He had often been puzzled by her transitions from one mood to another, as instantaneous as they were incomprehensible; and now he sometimes was forced to ask himself

if he had any real acquaintance with her character.

His impending dread was intensified by the results of the performance of *Froufrou* in Washington, which took place nearly a month after the performance in New York.

Evert Brookfield had never had so much work on hand since he had first formed his partnership with Delancey Jones; but he dropped everything for three days, and accompanied his wife to Washington. He went with her to the entertainments given in her honor and Mrs. Suydam's; and again he stood at the wings and watched her performance of the wayward, ill-balanced, and adorable heroine. He wondered whether or not it was the result of his own change of feeling, but he thought she did not play the part as well in Washington as in New York; she was far more self-conscious, and in the great scene of the two sisters she was more restrained, not to say stiff. Yet he could not but acknowledge that her success was quite as great the second time as the first; and the reason for this was clearer to him than it had been before.

It was due not to the ability of the actress, but to the charm of the woman herself, who could exert the potent fascination of sex even across the fiery circle of the footlights. She might have been a more accomplished actress, but she could not have been more attractive; and, on the other hand, she might have been the most awkward of amateurs without breaking the spell.

After the curtain had fallen for the fifth time, there were as many recalls from the public as at the Metropolitan, and as many congratulations from the friends who swarmed upon the stage. There was a supper that night given to all the performers at the house of a cabinet minister; and there was a late and elaborate breakfast the next morning at the house of a wealthy senator. Then the whole party returned to New York; and Evert ventured to hope that he would hear less of the theater for the rest of the winter.

It was with impatience that he glanced through the Washington papers of the morning after the performance and at the New York papers of the following Sunday. He was tired

of the same bald praise and the same complacent misinformation. He threw himself into his work with renewed energy; and he hoped that his household would resume its former satisfactory placidity.

In this he was disappointed, for there was very soon a proposal for a performance of an Ibsen play, all by amateurs, with Carla in the chief character. It was to be either *Hedda Gabler* or the *Doll's House*; and the choice was to be left to Mrs. Brookfield.

With this new proposition Mrs. Jimmy Suydam had nothing to do. She had cleared some fifteen thousand dollars for her society, and she was glad to return to her former easy-going existence, unencumbered with responsibilities. The Ibsen play was a suggestion of Gurney Twiss, who was insatiable in his histrionic appetite.

Nor was this new performance, distasteful as it was to Evert Brookfield, the chief of his worries. He became conscious slowly that there was a vague public expectation that Carla was going on the stage as a professional actress.

Friends stopped him in the street to inquire if there was any truth in the report. Paragraphs appeared in the papers, now and again, referring to the probable appearance of a leading society lady in the chief theaters of the United States. He could not trace these reports to any definite source; and when he spoke to Carla about them, she only laughed, and said, "How absurd!" But he suspected that these paragraphs were not so ungrateful to her as they were to him.

And this did not reassure him; indeed, a fear seized him that she might have been possessed by the desire for the excitement and the notoriety which success on the stage can give. He sought vainly for evidence in support of this suspicion, but he could find none. Carla, whatever undisclosed ambitions might be luxuriating in her inscrutable head, was in no wise different. She was out oftener, it was true, but when she was at home she was the same affectionate wife she had always been, and the same devoted mother. Her domestic affairs were managed with the same easy tact and with the same absence of friction. She continued to make

the house as comfortable as ever for her husband and for his father.

As it happened, the baby was not quite so well during the first week in April; he was teething, and he had caught cold also. Carla broke her engagements for a week to remain at home with her child; and she went out every day for a walk only because Dr. Brookfield insisted.

One evening she rose from the dinner-table while Evert and the doctor were smoking over their coffee.

"I think I'll just go up and take a peep at baby," she said.

"And how is my grandson this evening?" asked the doctor.

"He's cut that tooth at last," she answered, "and he scarcely cried at all! He's a brave little fellow. But there's another one coming on the other side, and it makes him restless in his sleep. Lina was up most of last night with him, and I think I had perhaps better take charge of him to-night myself—since you are not going to be here, Evert."

"I must take the midnight train," her husband answered. "But I'll try to get back to-morrow in time for dinner. I think I can do all I have to do before one o'clock."

He had been summoned to Boston to consult in regard to the plans of a group of model tenement-houses about to be erected there.

"I wish I was going with you," she said, standing behind his chair and smoothing down a little wave in his dark hair.

"I wish I was n't going myself," he returned, reaching up and taking her hand.

"Oh, it would be all right if we only went together," she declared. "I enjoy railroad trips. I envy the theatrical companies on the road; they have such lots of traveling. It must be a delightful life to be here one week and somewhere else the next—and to be welcome everywhere, and waited for, and boomed in advance, and all that. And then the dining-cars! I do like to eat a good dinner while I'm going forty miles an hour! The speed gives me an appetite!"

"Perhaps you would like to ride on a comet



and rely on the Milky Way for your ice-cream?" suggested the doctor. "Your traveling stars could n't have anything as exciting as that."

"They do have experiences almost as romantic," she answered, still playing with her husband's hair. "Archibald and Scott got telling about things when we were coming back from Washington, and she has had lots and lots of adventures. Why, once she played *Juliet* in a mining-camp, on a stage made of two billiard-tables! That must have been fun, don't you think?"

"I'm inclined to believe that it is more amusing to tell of now than it was when it actually happened," the doctor remarked.

Evert said nothing. He was disquieted, as he was always when Carla began to talk about the theater.

"I'll have your bag packed for you, Evert," she said as she moved toward the door. "And be sure you take a thick overcoat, for it looks as though we were going to have a bad storm."

When she had left them, the two men smoked

on in silence for a while. Evert, always observant, had noticed that the doctor had looked at her curiously. He became conscious that his father was then gazing at him, as though he had something to say.

What the doctor did was to press the electric button under his feet.

When the butler appeared, the doctor asked him to bring a folded paper he would find on the mantelpiece of the office.

"There 's something in it I want to show you," Dr. Brookfield said to his son, as the servant left the room. "It 's a copy of this week's *Upper Ten* that somebody has kindly sent me, after having marked a couple of paragraphs so that I could not fail to see them."

"Even that dirty little sheet can't have dared to say anything against you, father, I hope," asserted Evert.

"This is not meant to be offensive," the doctor explained. "Of course it is vulgar: the fellows who write for papers like that cannot help being vulgar; they are born so. But there is no desire to insult any of us in these para-

graphs. And it is not I they have chosen for a topic this time; it is Carla."

The butler returned with the copy of *The Upper Ten: The Journal of the Smart Set*.

When they were alone again, Dr. Brookfield opened the paper and handed it to his son.

Crosses in ink on the margin drew the reader's attention to two of the paragraphs in a department called "Our Whispering-Gallery."

Of late, Evert had avoided reading the various newspaper articles about his wife. He hated even to see her name in print. At his father's request, he now made haste to see what it was *The Upper Ten* had to say.

"In the most exclusive circles of society," it began, "nothing is talked about now, when two or three are gathered together *en petit comité*, but Mrs. Evert Brookfield's sudden success as an amateur actress; and the question is much debated whether so much beauty and talent will not naturally sooner or later seek its proper field of display on the professional stage. Mrs. Brookfield is one of the prettiest of our young matrons; she has dark eyes and light-brown

hair with splashes of gold in it when you get her in just the right light. Her husband is a good-looking man, too, as well as an architect of admitted ability. They have one child now, a manly little fellow not yet two years old. The handsome young couple are living with his father, Dr. Brookfield, the eminent specialist; and it shows the care with which Mrs. Carla Brookfield has approached her new art that she went to her father-in-law to get all the details of poor little *Froufrou's* death-bed just right from a medical point of view. For the scarf-dance in the *Doll's House*, which she is next to undertake, Mrs. Brookfield will be coached by Mlle. O. de Jouvence, the *première absoluta* of the new *Black Crook* company."

Evert read this to the end, and then looked up at his father with a scowl of contempt on his face.

"Yes," said the doctor; "it is distasteful, of course. But the fellow is nearer right than they usually are. Carla did ask me a question or two about *Froufrou's* death. But I had n't heard about *Nora's* dance."

"Nor I, either," returned his son, impatiently. "I don't believe there 's a word of truth in it! So far as I know, they have not yet decided whether to play *A Doll's House* or *Hedda Gabler*, or even whether they will play anything. I have n't spoken to Carla about it lately, and so I don't know just what has been done. I dislike the whole thing so much that I try to avoid talking about it."

"And yet you have been thinking about it constantly," the doctor declared gravely. "I have watched you, and it has worried me to see that you are carrying this thing on your mind."

Although ill at ease, Evert laughed a little. "I 'm all right," he returned. "I 've noticed you were keeping an eye on me, as you used to do when I was a naughty boy."

"You were never very naughty," said his father. "Now, read over the leaf."

"Is there more of the stuff?" asked the son, as he took up the paper again.

The second paragraph was about as long as the first.

"Few amateurs," it continued, "would put the same conscience into their work that Mrs. Brookfield does—and few professional actresses, either, for that matter. In fact, some of the most experienced first-nighters in New York who saw her act *Froufrou* declared that they had rarely been so impressed by any first appearance. It has been reported that a leading English manager cabled at once to see if Mrs. Brookfield could be induced to appear in London; but even if this is true, we understand that there is no likelihood of her accepting the proposal, in spite of the tempting terms offered. In fact, we are in a position to say, on the very best authority, that if Mrs. Brookfield does decide on a professional career she will put herself in the hands of one of the most enterprising of American managers, Mr. Ezekiel Kilburn, known to his friends from Portland, Maine, to Portland, Oregon, as 'Zeke.' Mr. Kilburn has been in treaty with Mrs. Brookfield for the past month, and although the contract is not yet signed, he expresses himself as perfectly satisfied with the outlook."

It was almost with a groan that Evert finished this paragraph.

"I did n't like it, either," said his father. "Is there any truth in it at all?"

"I don't know," the son answered. "Sometimes I'm afraid her head has been turned, and then again she is just as she used to be. I have feared that she might be carried away by the temptation—for it is a temptation to her, I admit. She loves admiration, and where can she get it so well as on the stage? She is getting fonder of excitement, also, and acting would give her that, too. I've watched her, and I've seen her mind playing with the thought and getting familiar with it. Then it was that I determined to hold my peace, and to let her fight out her own salvation."

"Are you sure that is the wisest policy?" his father asked. "Generally a wife who loves her husband as Carla loves you likes to have him decide for her all matters of importance."

"Perhaps you are right," Evert returned; "but I don't want to control her against her will. I want her to have her own way."

"Do you think that she really knows her own mind?" inquired the doctor. "I doubt it. She seems to me essentially womanly and eternally feminine; and if I am right in that, she will be glad always to do what you think best, if only you have tact in conveying your wishes to her."

"Do you think so really?" Evert wondered. "I confess I don't understand her always."

His father smiled tolerantly. "Did any man ever understand any woman?"

"Ever since I married her, I've done my best always to make her happy," pursued the son; "I've tried to give her everything she wanted."

"I doubt if mere indulgence is really the best way to make her happy," the doctor declared.

"I've tried always to find just what she means by what she says—" Evert went on.

The doctor's laugh was not mocking as he interrupted: "Come, come, Evert, don't you think you had better give that up as a bad job? No man can ever make sure of a woman's meaning. Of course not; if he could, it would be a betrayal of sex. Since the days of the cave-

dwellers, women have been trained to make indirection a vital principle. To be straightforward is to be unwomanly."

"Do you really believe that, father?" Evert asked.

"I am sure of it," was the response. "I discovered years ago that there is a great difference between the way a woman uses words and the way a man uses them. To a man a word is like a coin, having an exact value, but to a woman it is only a symbol. And with most women speech is used not to convey thought or to communicate information, but chiefly to express emotion. When a wife calls her husband a brute, she does not mean that, but she has just discovered that her dress does not fit."

"Carla has never called me a brute," said her husband, "and I've never given her cause."

"Some day you may get tired of going to the dressmaker's to be sure that her clothes fit," the doctor retorted. "And there is this to be said also, that Carla is larger-minded than most women, I think, just as she is more charming. Perhaps it is her certainty of admiration that

puts her above some of the petty weaknesses of the sex."

"That is rather subtle, is n't it?" Evert asked. "But I see what you mean, and I agree with you. Carla would be disappointed if she failed of the admiration she is used to."

"She is not likely ever to go without it," the doctor declared. "Other men have eyes as well as you and I, and they can see her fascination also."

"I am never jealous," Evert asserted; "I hope I have too absolute a confidence in her for that. But I am not blind, and I've discovered that she really cannot help trying to please every man who comes within her radius."

"Yes," the doctor agreed; "she has two voices, even—one for women and one for men."

"You have noticed that, too, have you?" his son asked, in surprise.

"She uses both on me," Dr. Brookfield explained; "apparently I am sometimes a man and sometimes a mere father-in-law."

"Even that old stage-manager," Evert continued, "that Sherrington, or whatever his name

was, a man used to the wiles of two generations of actresses—well, when Carla smiled at him, he let her have her own way at once.”

The doctor laughed out this time heartily. “They are none of them invulnerable, young or old, and she is invincible.”

“Don’t suppose I am jealous—” began Evert.

“I know you too well,” said his father, “and I know her too well. And what is more, I love her too much not to understand her a little. She is all the daughter I can ever have, Evert, the only woman now who will ever sit at the head of this table. She has brought youth and gaiety into this house, and I am grateful for it.”

The son looked at his father, and he nodded acquiescence.

“And then she is perpetually interesting,” the doctor continued. “I never know what she is going to do next. I know only that it will be something delightful—”

Evert raised the paper in his hand and pointed to the paragraph.

“This would n’t be delightful!” he said.

"That is not done yet," answered his father. "Of course it would be dreadful if it were to come to pass. Carla is nervous to-night, and restless—"

"What makes you say that?" interrupted her husband.

"Because I am sure of it," his father replied. "And she has been a little different the last week or so, as though she were approaching a decision she was in perplexity about."

"A decision?" Evert repeated. "Do you mean that she is seriously considering going on the stage?"

"I think she is considering it," was the answer; "but I don't think she will go."

"If she has gone so far as to dally with the temptation, I'm in deadly fear she may yield to it at last," said the son.

"I am not," returned the father. "The longer she dallies with it, the less likely she is to yield to it. The temptation may glitter, but a second thought will reveal that it is not golden. Carla is no fool: she likes her life of ease and luxury; and she will hesitate before

she gives that up for the exacting hard work of the stage. As a joke, as an experiment, as a relaxation, acting is enchanting, but as a business it is not alluring; and Carla will remember that before it is too late."

"That 's true," Evert admitted; "she is not so impulsive as she seems sometimes. She—well, she kept me waiting three weeks before she accepted me."

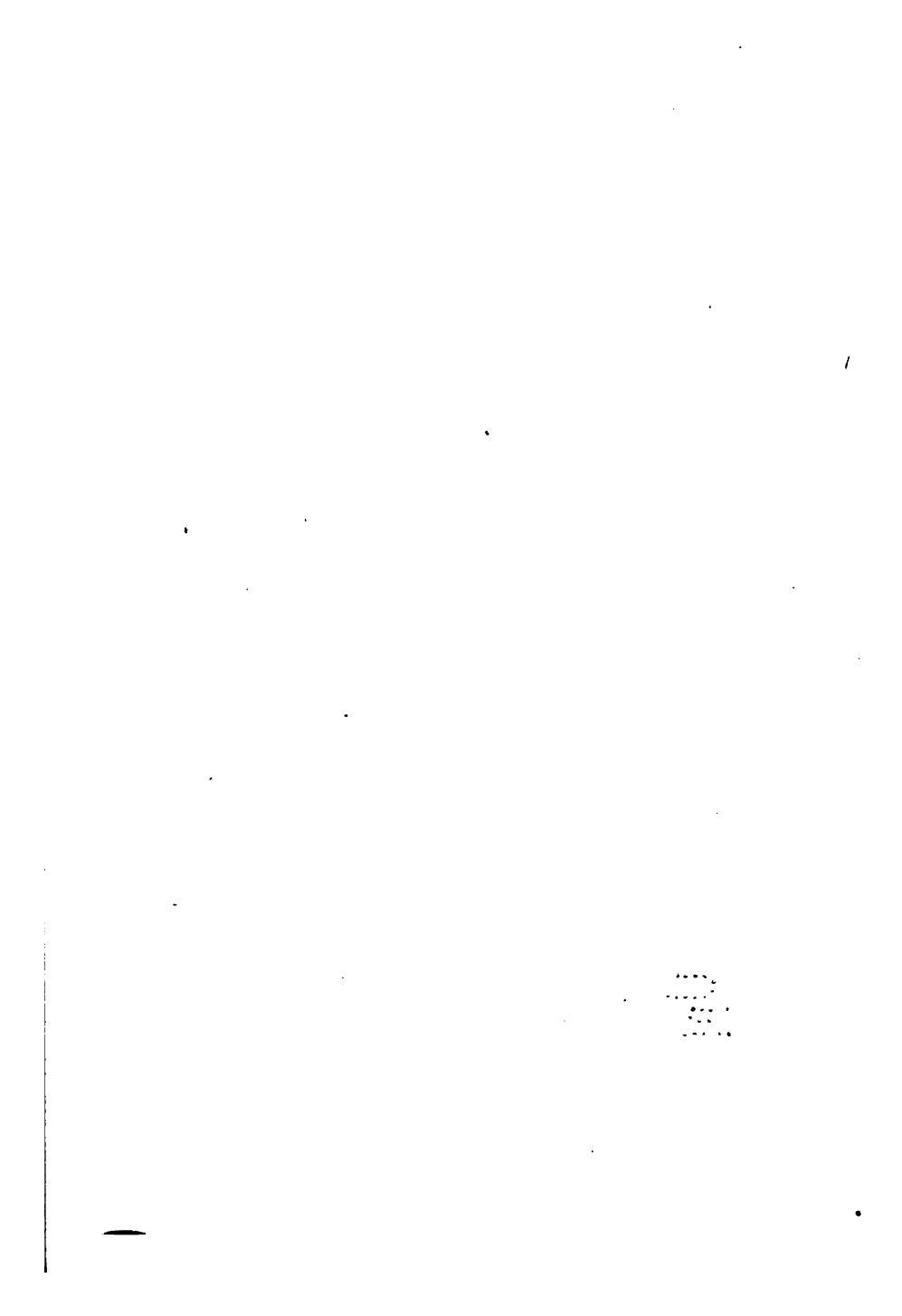
"You see," said the doctor. "And that 's why I am not really afraid, although the situation is ticklish, I confess. Then there 's another point in our favor. To put it plainly, Carla would hate the promiscuity of the theater—you know what I mean. She is hearty and jolly, but she has innate dignity and reserve."

"That is true," Evert assented, taking hope from his father's manner. "But suppose she takes the plunge and these things are made plain to her only when it is too late. I detest the theater for my own sake now; I have watched the working of the virus in myself. I was getting to be almost as eager as she was for



" ' FATHER, YOU DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH I LOVE HER.' "

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puffs in the papers. A little more, and I would have turned press-agent for my own wife!"

"I 'm glad you declined the job," said the doctor, dryly. "You are too analytic to do that sort of thing in the most effective way. But you might have carried her hand-bag with the jewels she did n't want to have stolen. And you could have stood at the side-scenes with her shawl."

"I 've done that already," Evert confessed, "and I was aware at the time of the absurdity of it. I was counting the steps of my own degeneration, and then it was that she made me see the reporter for her."

The doctor laughed again. "I don't believe the reporter liked that any better than you did," he said.

"I don't believe he did"; and the son joined in his father's laugh, as the vision rose before him of the rueful face the newspaper man had made.

"I should n't wonder if you had gone through the worst of it," the doctor declared. "The fever may have run its course. To-night, as I

said, she is not quite as calm as usual, so it seems to me. There is electricity in the air, and a sensitive nature like hers is susceptible to these influences."

"I am glad you think the worst is over," Evert returned as he rose to his feet. "I wish I could think so. Sometimes I do, when I reflect how impossible it would be for her, with all her delicacy and refinement, to stand the coarse labor of the theater. My heart sinks for her. And I don't see how I can do anything. I would not control her decision if I could. If she is really tempted to leave her home for the stage, she must make her choice herself; and if she gives up this gratification of her vanity, she must do it of her own accord, and not on my account."

His father looked at him with pride as his son stood erect, and then he smiled with satisfaction.

"Evert, my boy," he said, "do you know the best card in your hand in this game you are playing? It is yourself! It is lucky for us all that you are a strong, healthy fellow, rather better-looking than the next man."

"Do you suppose she thinks of that?" the son asked skeptically.

"Quite possibly she does not *think* of it," his father answered. "But she *knows* it, and she is in no danger of forgetting it."

Evert laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder, saying: "Father, you don't know how much I love her!"

The doctor looked up into his son's eyes as he answered: "I think I do. At least, I know how I loved your mother."

They said nothing for a minute, and then the clock struck. Evert glanced up. Seeing that it was ten, he shook hands with his father, and went up-stairs to make ready for his midnight journey to Boston.

CHAPTER IX

Evert and his wife occupied the front room over the drawing-room, and the large nursery was at the rear of the house. He went to their room, and hastily changed his dress-suit for clothes suitable to the work he expected to do in Boston the next morning. He found that his wife had already packed his suit-case for him, on the chance that he might be detained overnight.

He reflected that, impulsive as Carla was, and irresponsible in her moods, she was thoughtful also. Whatever her changing interests, she never neglected his comfort. It was with a feeling of gratitude that he glanced around the room where they had lived most happily for now more than two years—the most trying years of matrimony, he believed. It seemed to him that their union had now been welded by time, and that

hereafter nothing could ever come to interfere with its harmony. She had her peculiarities of temper, no doubt, and so had he; but they loved each other quite as much now as they had done during the honeymoon. In the course of the coming years they might disagree as to this or that, but he felt sure that their affection was deep-rooted enough to resist all petty divergencies.

When he was dressed, he hesitated as to whether or not he should go into the nursery, at the risk of arousing the baby. He stood at the window irresolute, and he gazed into the gathering storm. The wind was high, and he saw that it was no mere April squall that was coming. The night was black, and the sky was swept clean of stars. The lightning was already playing along the edges of the distant clouds, and he thought that the rain would perhaps break over the city before he should leave the house.

He heard the rustle of his wife's dressing-gown, and he turned to see her coming toward him with her finger at her lips.

"He has just gone to sleep again," she whispered, "and he does look so lovely in his crib—like a little angel! You must come and have a last look at him, since you are going away to neglect him for a whole day!"

"But I've got to go," he explained, "and I hope to be back in time for a late dinner to-morrow."

"That has nothing to do with it," she returned, glancing up at him, while the dimple that he adored appeared and disappeared. "You are deserting us now just for your horrid old business! As if your wife and baby were not more important to you than anything else! Now, don't answer! I do hate to argue, and you ought to know that by this time. Come and say good-by to baby—and be as quiet as you can."

So she led him into the nursery; and they stood for a minute by the side of the crib, gazing down on the child they both loved, but not as they loved each other.

Evert put an arm around his wife's waist and took her warm hand in his, as she led him back

to their own room. He wondered why it was his father had suggested that she was a little nervous that evening.

When they reached the front room, she said: "You have n't got to go for an hour yet, have you? Then sit down here by the fire and toast your feet."

She established him in a broad chair, and she perched herself on the arm of it.

"It is n't half-past ten yet by that clock," she declared, "and there's plenty of time for a nice long talk, is n't there?"

Evert responded that he had his ticket and that his sleeping-car section was reserved, and therefore he need not leave the house until twenty minutes or so before midnight, although he had ordered a cab for half-past eleven.

"That's just what I thought," she declared; "and even if you are going to leave me for a night and a day, I don't see why you should be in such a hurry."

Her husband saw no necessity for retort. He was satisfied with the situation and willing to prolong it. But he had so studied the tones

of his wife's voice that he knew she had something on her mind—something she wanted to say to him before he went; and he suspected that she was unconsciously more caressing in her manner than usual that he might thereby be put in a more promising frame of mind to receive her communication.

Whatever it was she wished to say to him, if anything there was at all, she made no haste to approach it. She spoke first about the baby and then about his father.

At last the conversation dropped, and they sat there in silence, with the wood fire crackling and sparkling before them, and with the storm steadily rising outside.

Then Evert saw her look at the clock and bite her lips impatiently. It seemed to him that her voice was not quite the same when she began.

"I had a visitor to-day," she said.

"Don't you have more than one most days?" he asked.

"Oh, of course," she replied; "I had half a dozen to-day. But I mean one in particular. Guess who."

"How can I?" he inquired. "Was it the President of the United States?"

"Don't be absurd!" she returned. "It was Mr. Kilburn."

"Mr. Kilburn?" Evert repeated. "I don't know any Kilburn, do I?"

"No, you don't know him," she answered; "at least, I don't think so; but you have seen him, and he wants to meet you."

"Kilburn?" said her husband, a little puzzled. "Where have I seen him? Who is he?"

"He is the manager of the Cosmopolitan Theater," she explained.

"Oh, that oily creature!" said Evert.

Carla laughed. "He is greasy-looking, I'll admit," she replied.

"And what business had he to call on you," asked her husband—"to call on you without an invitation, too?"

"Oh, but I did ask him," she explained swiftly.

"You asked him to call on you?" And as he said this he began to be possessed by disturbing doubt. "Why?"

"Why?" she repeated, a little taken aback by her husband's directness.

"What on earth did you want to see him for?" Evert asked.

"It was Mr. Kilburn who wanted to see me," she responded.

"Why?" repeated her husband, already aware that his wife was beginning to be a little ill at ease.

"Why?" she echoed again. "Oh, well, he had a reason for wanting to see me, and it was a good reason, too."

"Well?" he said, as she paused.

"Well," she answered, "I suppose I've got to tell you about it—but promise me you won't be angry"; and she laid her arm along his shoulder.

"Of course I sha'n't be angry," Evert declared. "It would take more than this Kilburn to make me angry. But I confess I had hoped you were rid of all these theatrical people."

"Now, don't be so prejudiced, Evert!" she returned. "There are just as nice people on the stage as there are anywhere else."

"I don't doubt it," he admitted.

"Well, then?" she inquired.

"Well, then," he went on, "if you insist on my saying what I think, I can only tell you that while these theatrical people may be very nice in their own way, their way is not my way, and I don't care to get any better acquainted with them."

"I think that is perfectly absurd!" she cried.

"It's quite unworthy of you! I did n't think you were so narrow!"

"I may be narrow and I may be absurd," he answered, "but if I am, I can't help it. That's how I feel."

"You have often told me I ought to learn how to control my feelings," she retorted. "Don't you think you should try, too?"

"I have tried," he returned, "and it's no use."

"You don't like theatrical people," she went on, "and yet you know lots of things about people we are meeting all the time in society—lots of things that are not nice."

"Come, Carla," he said, with a laugh, "there's

no need of our debating society and the stage, just as if we were members of the Contemporary Club."

She laughed in her turn. "It is ridiculous, is n't it? But I can't bear to see you on the wrong side—and so very obstinate about it, too. And I was hoping you would be so yielding and considerate to-night. I wanted to ask you for something."

"I did n't know I was so formidable that you had to wait till I was in a good humor before asking for anything," he remarked.

"Oh, well," she explained, with her dazzling smile, "you are different, you know. Sometimes you will do anything I ask you, and I feel as if it was just a pleasure to us both. And then sometimes you are cross—just as you have been this evening."

"Have I been cross this evening?" he asked.

"Dreadfully cross," she replied; "ever so cross! So cross I don't dare ask you anything now."

"Very well, then," he responded; "if you are

afraid of me, of course you had better not tell me what it is you want."

"I could n't think of telling you now," she asserted, with mock gravity. "You are simply too fierce for anything to-night."

"That 's all right," he said, laughing again with sheer enjoyment of her self-revelation. "We will talk about something else."

"Oh, but I don't want to talk about something else," she swiftly retorted. "I want to talk about this and get it over. If you were only as nice now as you are sometimes, you would urge me to tell you what it is I want."

"Then I 'll be as nice as I can, and I 'll urge you," he returned. "What is it that you want?"

"It 's a great favor," she answered; "at least, you 'll think so, I 'm afraid. And I don't know how to ask you."

"Why not?" he inquired, thinking how lovely she looked with the firelight playing on her burnished hair.

"You won't like my asking you; at least, I 'm ever so much afraid you won't," she

answered. "But if I must, I must. Well, then, Mr. Kilburn was here this afternoon—now, don't frown like that! You don't look so handsome when you frown, and I don't want you to go to Boston not looking your best!" And she left the fireplace, where she had been standing, and came to her husband, and smoothed out his hair, and rippled little waves in it.

"There, that 's better!"

He reached up, and pulled her toward him, and kissed her.

"Don't you muss the lace on this!" she cried, kissing him and then drawing back. "I never let anybody but baby touch me when I have this on."

Evert's eye happened to fall on the clock. It was about to strike eleven.

"Now, will you tell me what it is that you are making all this mystery about?" he asked.

"You are in a better temper now, are n't you?" she replied. "Well, it 's just this. Mr. Kilburn called here this afternoon to see me. You know he 's the manager of the Cosmopolitan Theater?"

"Yes," Evert admitted; "I know that."

"That 's the theater where Sherrington is stage-manager," she resumed, "and so, of course, Mr. Kilburn must have heard all about me from Sherrington. I must say I always found Sherrington very nice; they say he 's so hard, but he was n't hard to me, now, was he?"

"As if any man could be hard to you!" Evert answered, smiling in spite of the doubts which began to possess him.

"Except my own husband!" she smiled back. "He 's so hard sometimes I don't dare ask him a favor."

"You must be very frightened of him tonight," said Evert, "or you would come to the point."

"I am coming to it as fast as I can," she explained. "It was Sherrington who said I had the artistic temperament. I suppose he told Mr. Kilburn that. At any rate, Mr. Kilburn came here this afternoon to ask me if he could n't manage me for a twenty-week tour in the leading cities of the United States."

Her husband looked at her. "Manage you?" he repeated. "Does the man mean that he wants you to go on the stage and act in the regular theaters?"

"That was what he meant," she acknowledged.

"What impudence!" cried Evert, rising impatiently to his feet. "I wish I had been here! I'd have given him a piece of my mind! The insolence of it! That's what amazes me. Did the man think that you had nothing better to do than to desert your home and go strolling about the country, exhibiting yourself to any fool with a dollar?"

"A dollar?" she echoed indignantly. "Certainly not! Mr. Kilburn said he was going to double the price of tickets. He was sure I'd fill the house even if the orchestra was all three dollars. That's why he was ready to offer such good terms."

"Terms?" Evert repeated. "You don't mean to say you actually let this man suppose that for a single second you were willing to consider the suggestion?"

"Now, Evert," she pleaded, "don't be so violent. I did listen to him, that 's a fact, and he was very persuasive. I do wish you had been here and heard what he said. If you had heard him you would n't be so unreasonable now."

"Don't you think he is a little unreasonable when he comes here and calmly proposes that you should give up your home and your family, your husband and your child, just that he can make a few dollars?" Evert retorted.

"But he will make a great many dollars," she replied, "and so shall I. He says he 's sure—oh, certain sure!—I could be the biggest attraction on the road—think of that! He says he would n't wonder if I played to fifteen thousand a week for three weeks in Chicago. And he does n't want to make a hard bargain, either; he offers splendid terms."

"And what do I get?" her husband asked a little bitterly.

"Of course you get all the money I make," she explained, coming nearer to him. "You don't suppose I want the money for myself, do

you? That would be too mean. It's for you and baby and all of us."

"So you have gone so far as to decide what is to be done with the money you are going to make by acting in theaters all over the country?" asked Evert.

"Not all over the country," she replied. "Of course not—only in the cities. It's true Mr. Kilburn thinks there might be money in playing the one-night stands in New England, but we have n't settled that yet."

"What have you settled?" inquired her husband, chill with apprehension that she might have made the fatal decision without waiting for him.

"Of course there's nothing positively settled yet," she explained: "I told him that I'd have to consult you and see what you thought about it. Then we were undecided about the name."

"The name?" echoed Evert.

"The name I'm to be billed by," she answered. "Mr. Kilburn thought that 'Carla Brookfield' would be very attractive, just copying my signature, you know; but finally he

came to the conclusion that 'Mrs. Evert Brookfield' was more dignified. It gave more of a society air, he said. And then he had a capital idea. He 's going to have it printed on a sixteen-sheet poster—one of those great big ones you see on the fences when they are building; well, he 's going to have it printed just like my visiting-card, you know, plain black on white, with 'Every evening at 8:15' down in one corner, just as if it was scrawled with a pencil when I was calling. That will be effective, won't it?"

"Yes," Evert repeated, not knowing how to take it; "that will be effective."

"And I liked that name best, because I 'd like everybody to know I 'm your wife. I think it 's simply absurd of Archibald to call herself 'Miss' when she 's been married twice. Then we talked about the money I shall make," Carla continued, her courage having returned to her, and her interest in the stage taking possession of her. "Mr. Kilburn must be a very good business man, and he said he could suggest lots of first-rate investments to me."

Evert could not restrain a hard laugh. "Is n't that counting your chickens a little too soon?"

"I suppose it is early for that," she admitted, "but it is well to look ahead, is n't it? You see, I'm not such a fool as you seem to think I am sometimes; and Mr. Kilburn offered me a thousand dollars a week and ten per cent. of the gross and all our traveling expenses, with our own private car, and half the profits, too."

"Oh," said Evert, merely for the sake of talking, "you are to have half the profits?"

"Is n't that generous of him?" she responded. "And he said he was going to work up the biggest boom for me anybody had ever seen since Bernhardt was here the first time; and he told me he thought I might make as much as five thousand dollars a week, and in the twenty weeks that would be a hundred thousand dollars. And that would be very nice, would n't it? You see, I've been thinking it all out by myself, and I'm going to be the business woman of the family."

Evert looked at her and said nothing.

"I don't see why I should n't be the bread-

winner for us both," Carla went on. "I'd like baby to have ever so much money when he grows up, the dear! Now, you never expect to make a great big fortune, do you, Evert?"

He answered that he saw no prospect of it.

"You never expect to be a millionaire, do you?"

And again he admitted that his expectations were more modest.

"Well, then," she returned, "why should n't I do it? A hundred thousand dollars a year—why, in ten years that would be a million, would n't it? And I should n't be really too old to act even then. But a million would be sufficient, I suppose. How much do you make a year, Evert?"

"I?" he asked, aroused from the dumb astonishment in which he had been listening to her. "I make five or ten thousand a year, and next year I shall do better, with the Methuselah building."

"And I got you that, did n't I?" she retorted gaily. "I talked to that old man and his frump of a wife until he just had to give you the job.

But in the future we need n't bother about teeny little things like that. A million in ten years! That would be worth having, and to think that it will be all of my making! Won't you be proud of your little wife then? And a million is n't so much, either—Bernhardt has made more than that, and Patti ever so much more. Why should n't I?"

Evert winced. "Now, Carla," he began, trying to control his voice, "don't mention yourself with them."

"Why not?" she asked cheerfully. "I know they were not in society. I know all about that, of course; but, after all, what does that matter to a great artist?"

"Are you so sure you will be a great artist?" was her husband's next question.

"Not at first, I suppose," she replied. "But in time, why not? I told you Sherrington said I had the artistic temperament. Well, then? Besides, Bernhardt and Patti had to be beginners once."

"Don't," he begged of her, "don't keep talking of those women."

"I won't if you 'd rather I did n't," she replied. "I'll try to do everything you wish."

He looked at her again, and he could not discover that this was not said in all sincerity.

"Carla," he began, as calmly as he could, "if you go on the stage and act in Chicago and everywhere else, what is to become of me?"

"You?" she asked. "Why, you will be with me all the time, of course! You did n't suppose I meant to leave you behind, did you?"

"How can I leave the office for weeks at a time?" he asked her next.

"But you can give up the office," she explained. "If I'm going to make a million in ten years, what's the use of your slaving in the office and working yourself to death just for five thousand dollars a year?"

"Do you really expect me to abandon my work and let you support me in idleness?" he asked.

"I don't see why you should n't," was her answer. "I've let you support me ever since I was married, have n't I? And you must

know how delighted I 'd be to have you use just as much of my money as you wanted."

"Would you be willing to have me come to you whenever I wanted fifty cents to tip a waiter?" was his question.

"Of course not," she answered. "You would have plenty of pocket-money for yourself—why, you would have it all; I don't want it for myself!"

"Do you want me to give up my own life to be nothing but Mrs. Brookfield's husband," he asked, "following you round like a dog, holding your wrap for you so that you won't catch cold when you come off the stage, seeing the reporters for you, taking up your quarrels and almost coming to blows with the husbands of rival actresses—"

"Oh, but there won't be any rival actresses," she interrupted emphatically. "Why, I am to be starred all alone, and of course I shall select the company. By the way, I wonder if Gurney Twiss would like an engagement; he is only an amateur, but then he does look like a gentleman, after all."

Evert allowed her to finish, and then he said very quietly, "And the baby?"

"Baby," she repeated; "what has he got to do with it?"

"What are you going to do with him while you are being boomed in Chicago?" insisted Evert.

"I've thought about baby, too, and I really don't know what is best," she admitted. "I don't see why he can't stay here with your father for the present—he's ever so fond of him; and then I shall feel so much safer when I am away, feeling there's a doctor in the same house with him. And when he grows up a little—when he's nine or ten—I suppose we could put him in a good boarding-school."

"Oh, Carla!" said the father.

And she resented at once the reproach she perceived in this. "Now, Evert, don't be so unreasonable! You talk as if I was a bad mother. You know I'm perfectly devoted to baby. You ask your father if he's ever seen a more devoted mother than I am. Is n't that just like a man? They think a woman ought

to be kept in the nursery all the time! Now, I left the nursery more than ten years ago, and I'm not going back there, even for baby's sake. Besides, Lina says I spoil him, as it is, and she's very faithful; and I should n't be afraid as long as she had charge of him."

Evert heard the howl of the rising wind outside, as a sudden gust shook the windows. He saw that the hands of the clock were going forward steadily, and that they now showed it to be a quarter after eleven. He noticed how the bark on one of the logs on the fire was splitting off and burning with a dull glow.

Then he looked at his wife. "Carla," he began, "do you know what this means that you are talking about—this going on the stage? It means separation!"

"But I told you I wanted you to go with me everywhere," she cried. "I'm not going away unless I can take you with me. And I'm sure I ought to know what it means better than you do, for I've thought about it longer. It means money for all of us, so that you can have lots of things you would like. I've heard you

wish you had a four-in-hand. Well, you can have it if I make a hundred thousand a year; or you can have a yacht, or anything else."

"It means separation," he repeated. "You might as well understand it now, once for all. It means separation. There may be men willing to live on their wives' earnings, but I don't belong to that breed!"

"Why, Evert," she said, in dismay, "I don't see why you should take it like that. I thought you might not like it at first, but you always have let me have my own way so far, and—"

"And I shall not try to thwart you now," he answered. "If you want to go on the stage, go. But don't expect me to have anything to do with it. If you go, you will have to go alone."

"Go without you to all sorts of places I don't know anything about?" she replied. "Oh, I could n't, I could n't! It's cruel of you to suggest it."

He saw his advantage, and he pursued it. "If you go, I shall stay here with my father and my child."

"You don't mean to take baby from me?" she protested, with a rising irritation.

"Certainly not," he answered. "And you just said yourself, did n't you, that you intended to leave him here?"

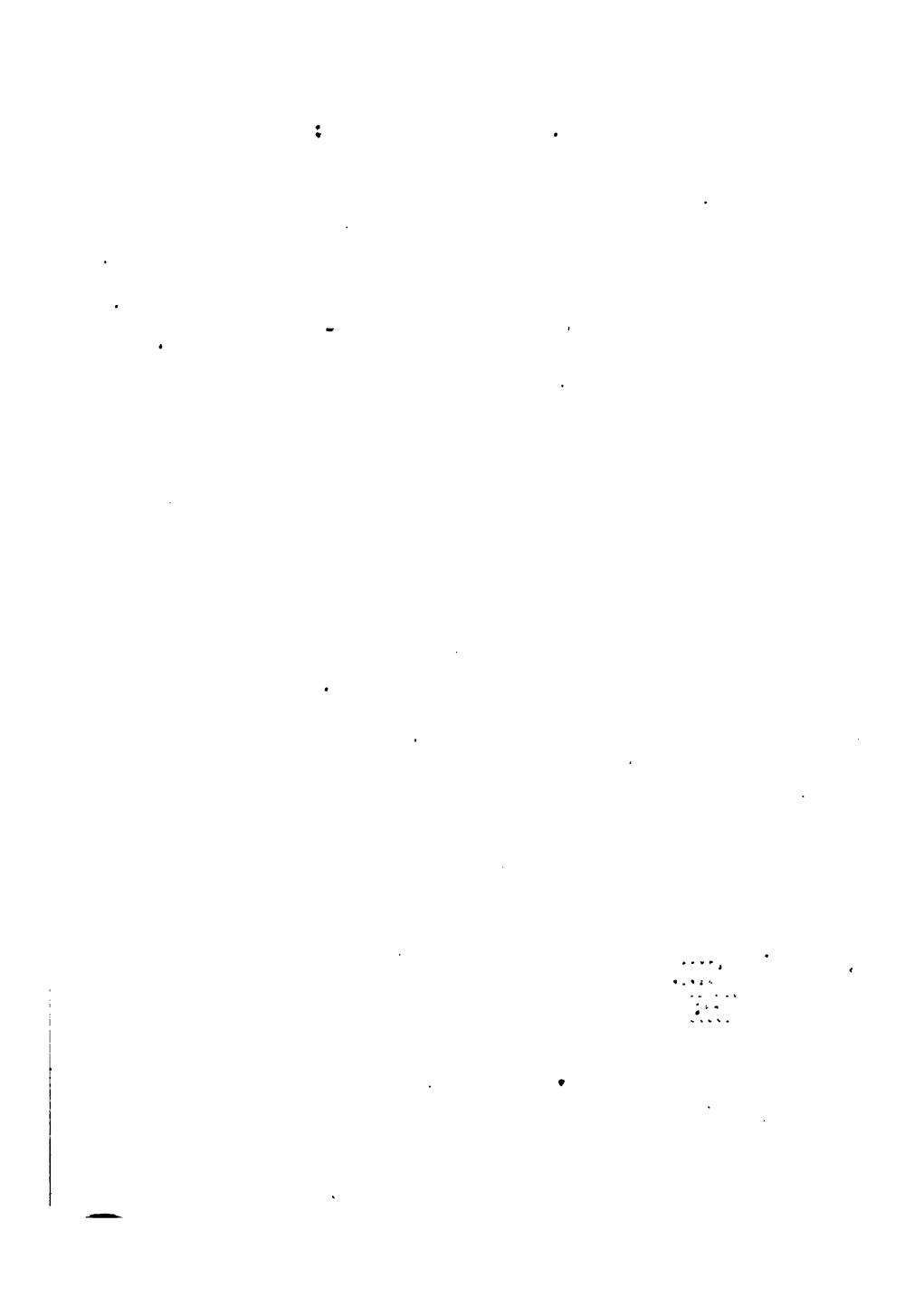
"You need n't try to push me into a corner, Evert," she retorted. "It is n't fair, either. It's unmanly. That's what it is! I'd sooner have you strike me than be so brutal to me! And you a great, big, strong man, too! I should think you would be ashamed of yourself. You don't want me to have a chance to make a name for myself! You want to spoil my career! You are selfish, that's what you are, perfectly selfish! You never did think of anybody but yourself. I might have known how it would be when I married you."

Her husband gazed at her as she paced the room with angry feet. He had seen her out of temper before, but never like this. It wounded him that she should call him selfish, and he asked himself if there was any truth in the accusation. He tried to be just; but he knew how willing he had always been to yield to her,



“‘AND THIS IS WHAT MARRIAGE IS, IS IT?’”





to give up anything to please her. Then he recalled what he had heard his father say, that women used speech chiefly to express their feelings; and he recognized that his wife's charge might have no relation to fact; it might be merely an expression of her momentary emotion. He felt himself humiliated by her outbreak, but he was strengthened in his resolve.

He went to the fireplace and turned his back to the blaze.

Apparently she was expecting him to make some response to her last speech; but he said nothing.

She came to the chair in which he had been sitting, leaned her elbows on the back of it, and faced him.

"And this is what marriage is, is it?" she started again, with a bitter sting in her words. "You are to have everything, and I am to have nothing. You are to be master of the house and have your own way always, and I am to be treated as if I was only a spoiled child, a mere baby, not allowed to have a will of my own."

"Come, come, Carla," he said gently, "that is n't fair, is it?"

"Fair?" she repeated. "You are not fair to me! You accuse me of wanting to abandon my child, just as if I was an unnatural mother. I shall never forgive you for that, never, not the longest day I live! I think it was too contemptible, too cruel! And you seem to think, too, that a woman ought to live in the nursery all the time, just as if she was a hired nurse. Now, I've always done my duty as a mother, and I always mean to, no matter what you say to me. But I was a woman before I was a mother, was n't I? And I think a woman has some rights, after all. She has a right to live her own life, has n't she?"

She stopped for an answer, and Evert did not know how to check the current of her undignified volubility.

"That depends, I suppose," he began slowly, and she interrupted him promptly.

"That depends on whether you will let her, I suppose. And suppose I renounce my dependence? Suppose I claim my right to be myself

and to work for my own happiness in my own way; what then? I am not a slave, am I, or a talking doll, to be wound up and dressed and undressed again; or a squirrel in a cage, to go round and round, and never get out for a single second?"

The theatricalism of her phrases had already affected him painfully, and now in her words he thought he caught an echo of some play. The suggestion of insincerity he was afraid he had detected in her outburst was painful to him. He would rather she had really felt as she was speaking than that he should have doubted the genuineness of her emotion.

"That 's what I stand for!" she declared again, when she discovered that he had made no response to her assault. "I 've got a right to some happiness, have n't I, and a right to get it my own way?"

"And how about my happiness, Carla?" he could not refrain from asking.

"Your happiness?" she retorted. "Oh, you take care of that very well. That is in your own hands; you are a man! That 's the way the

world has been arranged by men to suit their convenience; and we women have no rights."

Speechless, he continued to stare at her, with a shrinking wonder whether her volubility was not almost hysteric.

"It's your selfishness that revolts me. I can see your motives—that's easy enough. You don't want me to be an actress for fear I shall outshine you! That's your real reason. I see through you! Who knows the name of the architect of any building anywhere? Nobody. But everybody knows the name of a great actress. And I should be famous not only in New York, but all over the United States, where you will never be heard of!"

"Oh, Carla, Carla!" was all the stricken man could say. He listened to her with horror, sick at heart from the wounds she dealt him. It seemed to him that a great gulf had suddenly yawned between them. Yet as he looked at her and saw the dark circles below her eyes, he knew that his love was great enough to bridge the chasm, even though this should be twice the breadth it was; and in some strange way he

felt convinced, also, that she loved him none the less for all this violence.

The clock struck. He turned, and saw that it was half-past eleven. He was glad that it was time for him to go.

"I must leave you now, Carla," he said as he took up the suit-case she had packed for him. "I trust I may find you calmer when I return."

He went to the door, hoping that she would call him back, but she made no sign. He found the butler coming up-stairs to tell him that the cab was at the door.

He sent the servant down to put his things in the cab, and he lingered, still believing that she might relent. Never before had he parted from her in anger.

At last he gave up hope and left the house, not knowing in what state he should find her when he returned the next day.

CHAPTER X

The storm broke over the city as Evert Brookfield sprang into the cab; and the rain beat furiously on the roof of the station as he settled himself in his section of the sleeping-car. It raced all the way to Boston with him, and it swirled around the crooked streets of the New England capital, making the young architect's morning visits even more disagreeable than he had expected.

He had slept in the train, in spite of the shock he had experienced at the discovery that his wife really contemplated a step that seemed disastrous to him and devastating to their home. He was young and strong and hopeful; and he was in the habit of keeping his nerves under control. As he stretched himself out in the sleeping-car, rushing onward through the night, he was intensely miserable, with a dull ache within him,

and with a sickening dread of the future. Hitherto he had found life rich in opportunity; but if his young wife should really do what she had proposed, then his future existence could not but seem empty and barren. He looked into the immediate future, and he foresaw his own impossible position, with his house desolated by the departure of the wife and mother. He loved Carla too much to blame her for her resolution; he rather laid the reproof for her temptation on that man Kilburn. He had hated the fellow at sight, and now the very name was odious to him. As he lay there, rocked by the swaying of the heavy car, the rhythmic rattle of the wheels bearing him toward Boston persisted in repeating the abhorred word, "Kilburn! Kilburn! Kilburn!"

Although he fell asleep at last, with the man's name reiterating itself, he did not slumber long. Before the train stopped at New Haven he was wide awake, and he felt then as though he should never sleep again, so sore was his heart at the thought of Carla and of her wilfulness and of his love for her. She had treated

him ill, but he bore her no malice ; he did not treasure up against her the hard words she had uttered. In fact, he was ready to confess that he loved her too well to care what she might say, so long as her words did not imply any change in her affection for him. And he recalled every phrase of that startling conversation, to discover what her feelings really were beneath the cloak of her speech.

Thus between waking and sleeping the night was passed. Once he dreamed that a hideous dragon, bearing an absurd resemblance to Zeke Kilburn, was carrying Carla away through the air, while her husband had to look on hopelessly, being chained to a rock in mid-ocean ; and when his wife had dwindled to a doubtful dot on the horizon, then came the turn of the tide, and the waves began to rise higher and higher, stretching up to engulf him. The arrival of the train in the Boston station aroused him from this unpleasant predicament ; and he arose, unrefreshed as never before after a night's ride in the cars.

The committee with whom he had come to

consult was composed of incongruous elements, and the morning session was wasted in needless discussion. Evert had hoped to get away at one o'clock, but he could not leave before he had done what he came to do. He was ready to defend his own ideas with full command of himself, but during the wrangling of two opinionated members of the committee, the young architect closed his ears to their needless dispute, and called up before his eyes the lovely vision of his wife bending over his boy's crib; and he almost groaned aloud as he foresaw the destruction to be wrought by her wayward determination to go on the stage.

A friend took him to lunch at a club, and asked him if he was ill or if he had had bad news. Then he asserted himself and broke out with voluble high spirits; and the friend looked at him doubtfully, and found occasion to inquire delicately if he was not working too hard, just as everybody had to do in New York.

When the committee met again after luncheon, a better spirit prevailed. One of the quarrelsome members had not returned, and the other

was assuaged by this. So the business was taken up in earnest, and Evert set forth his views and met all objections satisfactorily, and had the joy of feeling that he had done a good day's work.

When he caught the five o'clock train just as it was leaving Boston, the rain had spent its force, and the parting clouds permitted a few rays of sunshine to fall on the sodden landscape. His spirits had risen with the success of the task that had brought him, and he was glad again to get a glimpse of the sun.

But it seemed to Evert Brookfield that the train was unaccountably slow. He asked the conductor whether they were not behind time, only to be told that they were abreast of the schedule. Then he reconciled himself to the remaining hours of the journey, and resolutely mastered his impatience to be home again.

He was to be tried still further, as it happened, for there was a washout on the road, not far from New Haven, due to the violence of the rain-storm the night before; and Evert had to pace the track for nearly an hour, while the workmen

were shoveling away the earth that had slid across the track.

He had telegraphed that he would reach New York at eleven that evening; and now he telegraphed again that he might be delayed an hour or more.

At last the train was able to start forward once more, only to meet with other but minor delays, so that it was a few minutes past midnight when the engine made its flying switch just outside the New York station, and the cars rolled on into the train-shed. Evert was the first man to spring off the platform and jump into a cab.

He wondered whether Carla would be waiting for him. He wondered whether she would be glad to see him again, or whether she was still angry with him. He wondered whether her mood would have shifted as swiftly and as completely as he had seen it veer on other occasions. He had discovered her to be inscrutably feminine, and therefore infinitely various; and he knew that in his eyes not the least of her charms was her incessant mutability. Indeed, this was the characteristic of hers which had given him

a glimpse of hope now and again during the oppressive twenty-four hours through which he had just struggled.

As he let himself into the house, he saw the butler about to go up-stairs with something in his hand.

"You are up late, Wilson," he said, handing the man his hat and light overcoat.

"Yes, sir," was the answer; "but I 've just been out for this medicine, and—"

"Mrs. Brookfield is n't ill, is she?" cried her husband, calling up instantly a fleeting vision of death, and remembering with a swift pang how they had parted in anger.

"Oh, no, sir," the butler responded; "it's not Mrs. Brookfield—"

"Is it my father?" Evert asked, and he was ashamed of the sudden relief he felt at the knowledge that it was not the woman he loved who was ill.

"It 's not the doctor, sir, it 's the baby," explained the servant.

"The baby?" repeated Evert. "Nothing serious, is it?"



“‘YOU ARE UP LATE, WILSON.’”



"No, sir," the man replied; "at least, I don't think so. The doctor went in to see him, sir, and Mrs. Brookfield wanted him to order something, and she sent me out for it, and—"

A white-robed figure flitted to the head of the stairs, and Carla's voice asked: "Is that you, Wilson? Have you got the medicine?"

"Yes, ma'am," the butler answered.

"Why don't you bring it up, then?" was her next question.

"It 's Mr. Brookfield that 's just come, ma'am," Wilson began, "and I—"

"Oh, Evert!" she cried, and she floated downstairs and flung herself into his arms. "I'm so glad you are here at last. I thought you were never coming!"

"I telegraphed you," he started to explain.

"I know, I know," she interrupted. "But I wanted you here. Why were you so late? I was getting so nervous for fear that dreadful storm had carried away a bridge or something. I kept picturing all sorts of horrible things."

"There was a washout near New Haven," he began again, "and—"

"That 's all very well," she went on, "but I did so want you here. I don't see how you can bear to be away when baby is n't well. It 's lucky the dear thing has his mother here to take care of him."

"What is the matter with him?" Evert asked, as he and his wife went up-stairs together.

"I don't know," she answered. "That 's what worries me so. He 's feverish, and I 'm afraid he 's sickening for something."

"What does the doctor say?" he inquired.

"He says it is n't anything at all," she explained. "But then you know what your father is. He does n't think anything is anything unless it 's an amputation or something of that sort. And besides, I don't believe the doctor really understands about babies."

"But he prescribed something, did n't he?" Evert asked. "I thought Wilson—"

"Oh, yes," she broke in; "but he only did that because I made him. I don't believe he thought it would do baby any good. Do you suppose your father really appreciates the peculiarities of baby's constitution?"

Evert wanted to laugh. To return home and find his wife in this altered frame of mind was an immense relief after the tension of the past day and night. But he controlled himself.

"Father is n't such a bad all-round doctor, you know," he said.

They had come to the top of the stairs, and Carla turned suddenly.

"Oh, Wilson, where 's that medicine?" she cried.

The butler, who had been following them at a respectful distance, now approached and gave her the bottle.

"Thank you!" she said, with a smile; and Evert was keen-eyed enough to notice how pleased the servant was with this commonplace from her lips.

The butler turned at once, and was leaving them when she called him back. "Wait a minute, Wilson!"

Then she looked up at her husband, still clinging to his arm. "Have you had anything to eat, Evert?"

"I had a bite about four o'clock," he replied.

"And it 's now nearly one!" she responded.
"You must be nearly famished, you poor dear!"

Evert admitted that the thought of refreshment was not altogether unpleasant, and she ordered Wilson to bring up something on a tray.

When the butler had gone about half-way down the stairs, Carla whipped her arm out of Evert's, saying, "Oh, I forgot!"

She slipped down and overtook Wilson, and gave him a whispered order.

"Yes, ma'am; I understand," Evert heard him answer.

Then Carla rejoined her husband, saying:
"Come in here—there 's a lovely fire for you. I kept it bright on purpose. Are you sure you have n't caught a chill in those horrid cars?"

He followed her into the room, bright and warm and cheerful, with the furniture and the hangings she had chosen when his father had made her take possession of that whole floor. He looked again on all her little belongings, scattered here and there; and he thought how satisfactory a background her own room made for Carla herself. He reflected that only an

irresistible temptation could lure even a wayward and a wilful bird to flit from so perfect a nest. Yet it was the same room in which they had had the dreadful scene of the evening before, and he did not know whether or not she had changed her intentions. As yet, she had not referred to the discussion of the previous evening, and he was in no hurry to bring up the subject again, although he could not help hoping that she might have modified her views.

"It is a nice room, is n't it?" she asked, as though she had been reading his thoughts with that delicate perception which sometimes startled him by its accuracy, although he was also sometimes equally surprised by her inability to understand him even after he had given voice to his sentiments.

"Yes," he answered; "it is a very nice room indeed."

But she was paying no attention to him. She had torn the paper cover from the bottle of medicine and was holding it to the light.

"I wonder what this is?" she said. "It

looks as if it was ever so strong. I don't believe baby will like it."

"He is n't really ill, is he?" asked Evert.

"Not seriously," she answered, "but I do get so frightened about him when he's feverish. It's foolish, I know, and I can see that the doctor wants to laugh at me sometimes, but I just can't help it—there!"

She laughed at herself lightly, and her husband laughed with her. His spirits were rising. The room was comfortable, for one thing; and then her reception of him on his return had been unexpectedly affectionate. The dread of her breaking away from them all still hung over him, but the burden of it was lighter already, as the rash act seemed more and more unlikely.

He asked for all the details of the baby's ailment, and she was only too glad to supply them. She said she would take him in to have a look at the little darling the last thing before going to bed; just now baby was asleep again, and it would be a shame to risk waking him.

Then the butler tapped gently at the door and brought in a tray.

"There!" she said, in self-congratulation, as she rolled a little table in front of the fire; "that's what I thought you would like after your long ride in the cars."

Evert looked at the tray, and saw a little terrine of *pâté de foie gras* and a couple of rolls and a pint of champagne.

"You know what I like!" he said gratefully.

"I was sure a little champagne would be so refreshing for you," she went on, pleased with his pleasure. "And you have drawn the cork, Wilson? That's right—I was afraid the pop might wake baby. Thank you—everything is just as I wanted it."

The butler glowed with gratification again.

"There's nothing more you wish this evening?" he asked.

"No, indeed," she answered. "You can shut up the house now and go to bed."

When Wilson had gone, Carla made her husband sit at the table in front of the fire. She poured out his wine for him, taking a first sip herself to make sure that it was cold enough. Then she curled herself up on the sofa by the

side of the mantelpiece, where she could look at him as he enjoyed the supper she had ordered.

"You must n't eat fast, you know," she said; "and it's good for us to have conversation at our meals, so the doctor says. So you must tell me what you have been doing all day."

He thrust aside all thought of their disagreement the night before, and gave himself up to the pleasure of the moment—the warmth of the room, the satisfaction of the repast, the joy of seeing her again lively and lovely and loving.

He narrated the events of the morning, and she was properly indignant at those members of the Boston committee who had not aided and abetted her husband.

"I never did care for Boston people much," she declared. "The girls are ever so conceited; but some of the men are not bad-looking, I must say."

Evert went on to tell her how much more agreeable had been the afternoon session.

"I'm glad some of them had some sense, after all," she commented. "So you are going to get that job, too."

"I 'm not so sure of that," he explained. "We are going to be asked to join in a limited competition, but so are half a dozen other firms."

"Oh, they 'll give it to you," she asserted, with easy confidence. "I don't believe the judges will be such fools as not to know a good thing when they see it."

It always thrilled Evert with delight to have his wife express this unfailing trust in his ability and in his good fortune. And yet there now came back rankling again the echo of more than one of her angry remarks of the night before.

He took a sudden resolution. "And what have you been doing to-day?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," she answered; "nothing at all."

"Have n't you been out?" he continued.

"I have n't had my nose outside the door," she replied; "it was an awful day here, raining hard and blowing fiercely."

"Then you had no visitors, I suppose?" he pursued.

"Not one," she responded promptly. "And

I could n't really expect anybody to call in such weather, could I?"

"Then you must have had a lonely day," he went on, "for I know father was going out to that monthly dinner of his."

"Oh, I don't mind being alone," she returned cheerfully. "I 'm good company for myself, and then there 's baby. He 's enough to keep three or four mothers busy."

Evert looked at her as she said this, and smiled. "Perhaps I had better move out to Salt Lake," he suggested, "and be sealed to two or three plural wives, and then you could call on them to help take care of the baby."

"But I don't want anybody to help me," she retorted. "I can do it all alone, thank you. And if you ever look at another woman, let alone two or three, I 'll—well, I don't know what I 'll do to her!"

"Ought you not to do it to me?" he asked, laughing. "It would be my fault, would n't it?"

"Oh, I know women better than you do," she declared. "And if you ever got into the hands of a designing woman, I don't believe it would

be your fault; but I 'd never forgive you for it, never, not the longest day I live."

That was one of the phrases she had used the night before, and Evert remembered how she looked as she had said it. Now it fell from her lips as though she had never employed the words before.

Her husband looked at her, under cover of emptying his glass of champagne; but he could not even guess whether the sentence recalled to her mind any unpleasant memory.

She saw him set the glass down, and she sprang up to fill it.

"You must let me wait on you!" she declared gaily. "It 's a wife's duty to wait on her husband, is n't it?"

He determined to bring up the painful subject as soon as he could, and, if possible, dismiss it once for all.

"That is n't Ibsen's idea, is it?" he asked. "The *Doll's House*, you know."

"Oh, Ibsen!" she cried contemptuously. "What does that old bore up there in Norway know about American girls? Not but what

Nora is a good part, too; but it takes a graceful woman to do that tarantella properly. That 's what I was saying to Archibald this very afternoon."

"To Archibald?" he repeated. "To Miss Margaret Archibald?"

"There is n't any other, is there?" she asked in return.

"Was she here this afternoon?" he continued.

"She was here for two hours at least, and we had a very pleasant chat. She asked after you, and of course I could see she was ever so disappointed you were not at home. I remember the way she used to eye you at our rehearsals. You are good-looking, Evert, and I don't wonder she looked at you when she had a chance. You are ever so much handsomer than that Scott they say she 's going to marry. And I rather like her, after all. She 's no fool, and she 's a womanly woman, too, and I detest a woman who is always thinking about men."

"But I thought you told me nobody had called this afternoon," said Evert, as soon as his wife gave him a chance.

'Did I?' she returned. "I meant nobody we knew, of course. I was n't thinking of Archibald."

Now he was on the verge of the discussion, Evert hesitated. Perhaps if he pressed the subject now he might only confirm his wife in her intentions—if they were her intentions still.

"And what did Miss Archibald want?" he asked at last.

"She did n't want anything," Carla replied. "I had invited her to drop in for tea any afternoon, you know."

"And she had never been here before?" he inquired.

"Never," was his wife's answer. "And I don't know that she would have come yesterday if she had n't wanted to find out something. I half suspected that Kilburn put her up to it."

"Kilburn!" Evert repeated, and his heart sank again.

"Kilburn, the manager, you know," Carla explained. "I think he wanted her to spy out the land and see if there was any hope for him."

"Hope for him?" echoed Evert.

"Yes," she returned. "He actually wanted me to leave you and baby, and go all over the United States acting everywhere, night after night, just so that he could make a few thousand dollars. Some people do have the most absurd ideas!"

Her husband gazed at her in amazement. Accustomed as he was to her swift transformations, this one seemed to him more complete than any he had seen before.

He was so astonished that he was rendered tactless.

"But last night you said you wanted to be a great actress," he reminded her.

"Of course," she responded, "and I should like to be a great actress—who would n't? But I told you at once—did n't I?—that I was n't going to give up my home to go on the stage. I've heard too much about the theater to want to spend my life in it. Why, Archibald once had to act in a billiard-saloon! Think of me in a billiard-saloon!"

"I'm very glad you have given it up," he said, "but—"

"Given it up?" she repeated. "Why, I never for a moment entertained the proposition. That 's what I told you last night, did n't I?"

Evert looked her full in the face, and he could see nothing to suggest that she was not now speaking in good faith. Apparently she had changed her mind finally and absolutely, to his immense relief. Apparently, also, the modification of her intentions was so complete that it had destroyed all recollection of their former existence. Apparently she was not now conscious that she had not always felt as she felt at the moment of speaking.

"But last night—" Evert began again, still unable to adjust himself so swiftly to the changed conditions.

"Oh, last night!" she interrupted impatiently. "I did n't think differently last night, I 'm sure. I know you were very unkind to me last night, and tried to push me into a corner and make me say things I did n't mean. And I intended not to be friends with you, too, just because you were so hateful last night. But I never had the

slightest idea of accepting that Kilburn's offer; and that 's what I told you at once, only you would n't believe me. Besides, last night I was nervous,—those storms always affect me, and you know it,—so I 'm not sure what it was I did say. But I never could have said anything to make you believe for a single minute that I ever had even thought of going on the stage! Why, Evert, you ought to know me better than that! I don't think it 's really nice of you to seem to doubt me like that—and after I had ordered such a good supper for you, too!"

Evert had now had time to recover. "Yes," he said, smiling at her, "it is a very good supper, indeed. And here is the health of her who ordered it"; and he raised his glass again to his lips.

"I thought that little drop of champagne would be good for you," she smiled back at him. "I wish I 'd given you some last night, and then you would n't have been so cross."

He was about to protest, but he checked the words on his lips. "I must have been most disagreeable," he said.

"That 's just what you were," she acknowledged cordially—"most disagreeable! And I do hope it will never happen again!"

Evert thought it best to make no response to this. He devoted himself to the supper.

Carla had again curled herself upon the sofa, with one foot tucked under her. She gazed into the fire for a few seconds.

"If what Archibald says is true, and I suppose it must be," she began again, "there 's a great deal more hard work in acting than I dreamed of. I don't mean merely one-night stands in the oil circuit, and things like that, although they must be horrid, too. I mean real downright work, even when they are playing in New York. It is n't all fun, by any manner of means. Why, Archibald practises her voice every day, just as if she was a singer. She has exercises for training the vocal chords. Now, I 'd never have the patience to do that. I 'd like the satisfaction of being a great actress, but I should n't want to have to give up everything else in the world just for that. I don't think it would pay."

Evert agreed with her in thinking that the game would not be worth the candle.

"And there are lots of other things I don't like about the stage, too," she continued. "It is delightful to have everybody looking at you and to have them all agreed in admiration. Of course every woman can't help enjoying that! But you must meet all sorts of people in a theater, and I know I should n't like that at all! I like to pick and choose my friends, and I do hate familiarity! I used to shudder almost when Gordon Scott put his hands on me in *Froufrou*, I detested it so."

"Miss Archibald cannot feel as you do," Evert said, "or she would not be willing to marry him."

"I don't see what she can see in him," Carla returned. "He is good-looking, in a way, but he's effeminate, too; and I do like manly men. Why, Evert, you could take him over your knee and just snap him in two!"

"I felt like doing it, too," her husband confessed, "more than once, when I saw the way he looked at you sometimes when you were getting up *Froufrou*."

"I guess Archibald will keep him in order," Carla responded, "if anybody can. But I don't see what he sees in her, either—although she's twice too good for him, if all I hear is true. I think I'd rather play with the amateurs hereafter. Now, Gurney Twiss is a little gentleman, even if he can't act."

Evert had now finished his extemporized repast. He threw down his napkin and rose to his feet.

Carla sprang up from the sofa. "Was n't that a good supper?" she asked. "Did n't I order it nicely for you?"

"Thank you, my dear," he answered, bending down and kissing her.

"Now, I must n't keep you up any longer," she said, "but I want you to come in and see baby."

Evert followed her on tiptoe into the nursery. For a minute they stood beside the crib in silence. The baby was a little flushed, but he was sound asleep and breathing regularly.

"Is n't he lovely?" asked the mother. "And he is so like you!"

As they were walking back from the nursery to the front room, Carla looked up at her husband with a little frown on her face.

"I don't understand it at all," she said. "I don't see how you got the idea that I could ever think of leaving you and baby, and going on the stage to act in one-night towns on billiard-tables with creatures like Scott!"

Evert did not smile as he answered: "I trust I shall never again have so unpleasant a hallucination!"

CHAPTER XI

The climate of New York is well known to be capricious, especially in April. That month had begun with a sequence of blustering days which filled the streets with dust; then had come the heavy rain-storm of the night when Evert Brookfield went to Boston; and at last, toward the end of the month, the sky cleared and the sun blazed overhead, and the thermometer rose higher and higher. It was not spring that burst upon the city suddenly, but summer, rather, that burned fiercely, as though impatient to assert its full strength. Refreshed by the rain, the trees in the squares leaved out abundantly, and the grass sprang up vigorously.

Nowhere within the boundaries of Manhattan did nature assert herself more successfully than along the Riverside Drive, and nowhere has New York given nature a better opportunity.

By the last Saturday in the month the irregular hillsides had clothed themselves with beauty, and on that day a cloudless sky domed the mighty river as it swept majestically down through its rocky gateway. Ferry-boats thrust themselves from side to side, while heavy-laden sloops lazily dropped down-stream with the tide, and powerful tugs struggled up with a trail of barges retarding their progress. With a sinuous twisting of its manifold links, a freight-train rattled along at the water's edge. High above, on the broad road around Grant's tomb, there was an incessant sequence of carriages and bicycles and equestrians.

Out on the upper veranda of the restaurant a little party of six lingered over their late luncheon, in no hurry to mount their bicycles again. The Vicomte d'Armagnac was the host; he had completed his investigation into profit-sharing in the United States, and he was to return to Paris the next week. Mrs. Jimmy Suydam was the chaperon; and as she sipped her coffee she wondered again why the Frenchman had invited the Bartlett girls, not knowing



"A LITTLE PARTY OF SIX LINGERED OVER THEIR LUNCHEON"



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that these mature maidens had taken to bicycling with a view to such little entertainments as the one at which they were then present. The two other men were Mrs. Suydam's husband and Mr. Rupert de Ruyter.

It was the novelist who waved his cigarette toward the Hudson and said to the host: "That is n't a bad view for a big city to have in its back yard, is it?"

"It is magnificent," D'Armagnac admitted at once, "all simply magnificent."

"Don't you think you will miss all this sunshine when you get back to your gray Paris?" the elder Miss Bartlett inquired, with coquettish intent.

"Oh, Paris is another thing," the Frenchman returned, as though comparison was out of place. Then he sighed as he said, "I have fear that I will be in retard for the lilacs in Paris."

"Is it true that over there horses are going out?" asked Jimmy Suydam.

"Horses going out?" repeated the vicomte, doubtfully.

"Going out of fashion, you know," explained

Mrs. Suydam's husband. "I hear it 's the swagger thing over there to run an automobile."

"Automobilism is the mode, yes," answered D'Armagnac; "but the horse is king of sport always."

"That 's what I say," Jimmy returned. "I like to hold the ribbons over a well-matched four and feel their mouths and let them know who is master. I don't see any fun in steering a steam-engine through the streets; I 'd feel like a motor-man on a trolley-car—not but what I 'll try it some day if it is going to be the thing."

"What I like about the electric cabs here," Mrs. Suydam declared, "is the uncertainty. When I get into one of them I 'm always expecting to run over somebody or run into something, and that breaks in on the monotony of life!"

"But they are so very ugly, the electric cabs," the younger Miss Bartlett insisted. "Just look at that one, now! What does it look like?"

"It is rather clumsy, I must say," De Ruyter

returned; "but the gondolas in Venice are quite as dismal in appearance, and yet we've got used to thinking them picturesque."

The elder Miss Bartlett—Miss Kathryn—leaned forward. "Why, I declare," she cried, "if that is n't Carla Brookfield in the very electric cab we were talking about!"

Miss Evangelyn Bartlett chimed in instantly. "So it is," she asserted, adding promptly, with a suspicion of acidity in her tone: "And she's with her own husband, too!"

"I suppose Evert is looking over the ground," explained De Ruyter to D'Armagnac. "You see, they are going to build a viaduct over the valley there to carry the drive farther up along the river; it is to be a monumental undertaking, and they talk of putting a soldiers' and sailors' arch on it, too. I heard that Jones & Brookfield were to be retained as consulting architects, so Evert must have come up this afternoon to look over the ground."

Miss Evangelyn Bartlett hardly waited for him to finish before she snapped out: "But why should Evert bother about things like that, if

his wife is going to make ever so much money on the stage?"

And Miss Kathryn followed her sister swiftly: "You know so many managers and actors and Bohemians of all sorts, Mr. de Ruyter, perhaps you can tell us when Carla is to make her first appearance on the stage—of course, I mean her first appearance as a real actress."

De Ruyter laughed at this appeal. "Yes," he answered; "I can tell you that."

"Well?" asked one of them.

"When?" asked the other.

"When is Mrs. Evert Brookfield to make her first appearance as a professional?" the novelist said. "Never!"

"Never?" repeated the disappointed pair.

"Never," De Ruyter declared. "It's all off."

"That is what I said always," D'Armagnac asserted; "she was not made for the theater, that dear Mrs. Brookfield—elle n'est pas cabotine pour un sou."

"Are you sure?" pursued Miss Kathryn.

"Oh, yes," De Ruyter replied. "I had it from the very best authority. Zeke Kilburn

was the most disappointed man you ever saw. He thought he had coaxed Mrs. Brookfield into it, and he did offer her terms that would have tempted nine women out of ten. In fact, he seems to have tempted her almost; and she did hesitate, and Zeke had the contract drawn up and was just going to order his printing. I think even Evert was a little afraid of it, too, for he went around for a week looking as gloomy as the understudy for an undertaker."

"I conceive that," said D'Armagnac. "It would not make his affair to have his wife at the theater. Et une femme si ensorcelante que la sienne. Il ne doit pas s'ennuyer, ce mari-là!"

"And she resisted all temptations, even terms and contracts and printing, as you call it?" Mrs. Jimmy asked.

"She hesitated, as I said," the novelist responded, "and she was n't lost, in spite of the proverb. Kilburn thought everything was coming his way; and then when he called with the contract in his pocket, she did n't even see him—she just sent down a note conveying to him her decision."

The elder Miss Bartlett sniffed, and said: "I suppose she was afraid of losing her social position."

Mrs. Suydam laughed. "You speak of her social position as if it was a collar-button or something of that sort, to be lost by a slip of the finger, and then to be picked up from the carpet."

"It is not on the carpet that Mrs. Brookfield is going to act," said De Ruyter, looking around to see if his little jest had been appreciated before he lighted another cigarette.

"I don't think Dr. Brookfield would have liked to see his daughter-in-law on the stage," the younger Miss Bartlett asserted.

Again Mrs. Jimmy laughed a little satirically. "You know what Miss Marlenspuyk once said in a similar case? 'Actresses will happen even in the best families.'"

"I must say, I think Carla's eyes are a little showy for private life," suggested Miss Kathryn. "Don't you think so?"

This query was thrust at D'Armagnac, but he was too wary to commit himself.

Once more Mrs. Suydam turned the subject. "Evert Brookfield's eyes are lovely, if you like; they are appealing, just like a big Newfoundland dog's."

"Funny beggars, Newfoundlands," interjected her husband.

The elder Miss Bartlett was not willing to relinquish her prey. She began again: "Monsieur d'Armagnac?"

"Mademoiselle?" he responded, with his habitual courtesy.

"You are a Frenchman," she continued, "and you have seen society in Paris and in London and in New York. Now, tell us what you really think of Mrs. Brookfield. Do you think she is in good style?"

"Oh, mademoiselle," he answered, "I am a stranger here. Of what right can I express an opinion? All I can say you of Mrs. Brookfield is that she is charming—all that is most charming of the American type."

"Ah, but is Mrs. Brookfield an American type?" asked De Ruyter. "It is true the American type is the result of cross-fertiliza-

tion; and she is a hybrid. She came from St. Louis, and perhaps her great-grandmother was a Greaser. That 's where she gets her creole grace and her creole walk. Did you ever notice Mrs. Brookfield's walk? Well, that 's what trails a man after a woman, a swimming walk like hers, with its implied appeal for the support of a man's arm."

"Well, I must say!" said Miss Kathryn.

"For my part," Miss Evangelyn asserted, "I do not think that a walk like that is very nice, do you?"

D'Armagnac noticed that the expression had changed slightly on Mrs. Suydam's face, as though she was wearying of this prolonged discussion of another woman.

De Ruyter lacked the Frenchman's swiftness of perception, and he blundered ahead.

"There 's a certain type of woman—I don't say it 's an American type especially," the novelist continued, "and of course I don't mean to suggest for a moment that Mrs. Brookfield belongs to it—far be it from me to do such a thing. But there is a type of the

ewig Weibliche which is always a little surprised when it meets a man who does n't more or less fall in love with her, and which is also a little taken aback when a man does fall in love with her. The woman of that type is a born flirt; she can't help flirting at every stage of her career; in her cradle she flirted with the doctor, at school she flirted with the teacher, and when she's dead she'll sit up on ice to flirt with the undertaker!"

"Oh, horrible!" cried one Miss Bartlett.

"What a repulsive suggestion!" said the other.

"And yet if that woman," De Ruyter went on, "only has the good luck to fall in with just the right husband, then you see one of those happy marriages that keep up the reputation of heaven as a match-factory. He can't help loving her, of course; and if she only loves him, she makes the most devoted of wives."

"And do you think Carla Brookfield is as much in love with her husband as all that?" asked Miss Kathryn.

"As I said, I was not talking about Mrs. Brookfield," the novelist began.

"Oh, no," interrupted Miss Evangelyn; "of course not!"

"But since you ask me," he continued, "I must say that I have never seen a wife more in love with her husband than Mrs. Brookfield is."

"Ça, c'est vrai!" commented the Frenchman; and leaning toward De Ruyter to reach another cigar, he lowered his voice, and added: "Le premier jour, je voyais bien qu'il n'y avait rien à faire là."

"I say, D'Armagnac," said Jimmy Suydam, "these cigars of yours are not half bad, are they? I don't care if I take another."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mrs. Jimmy said calmly: "Carla is a dear girl, and I am getting to be very fond of her,—I am, indeed,—and I shall never forget her kindness in acting for my working-girls. But I don't really see what it is in her you men seem to find so fascinating. You can't say she is really a beauty, can you? You don't know what color her hair is, or her eyes either—not that that matters much. But you can't deny that her mouth is too large, and her hands too big, and

her figure too—well, too plump, if you will have it.”

And while her friends were thus dissecting her charms and her character, Carla Brookfield was perfectly happy in the company of her husband, who was explaining to her how he proposed to solve the difficult problem of bridging the Manhattan valley.

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